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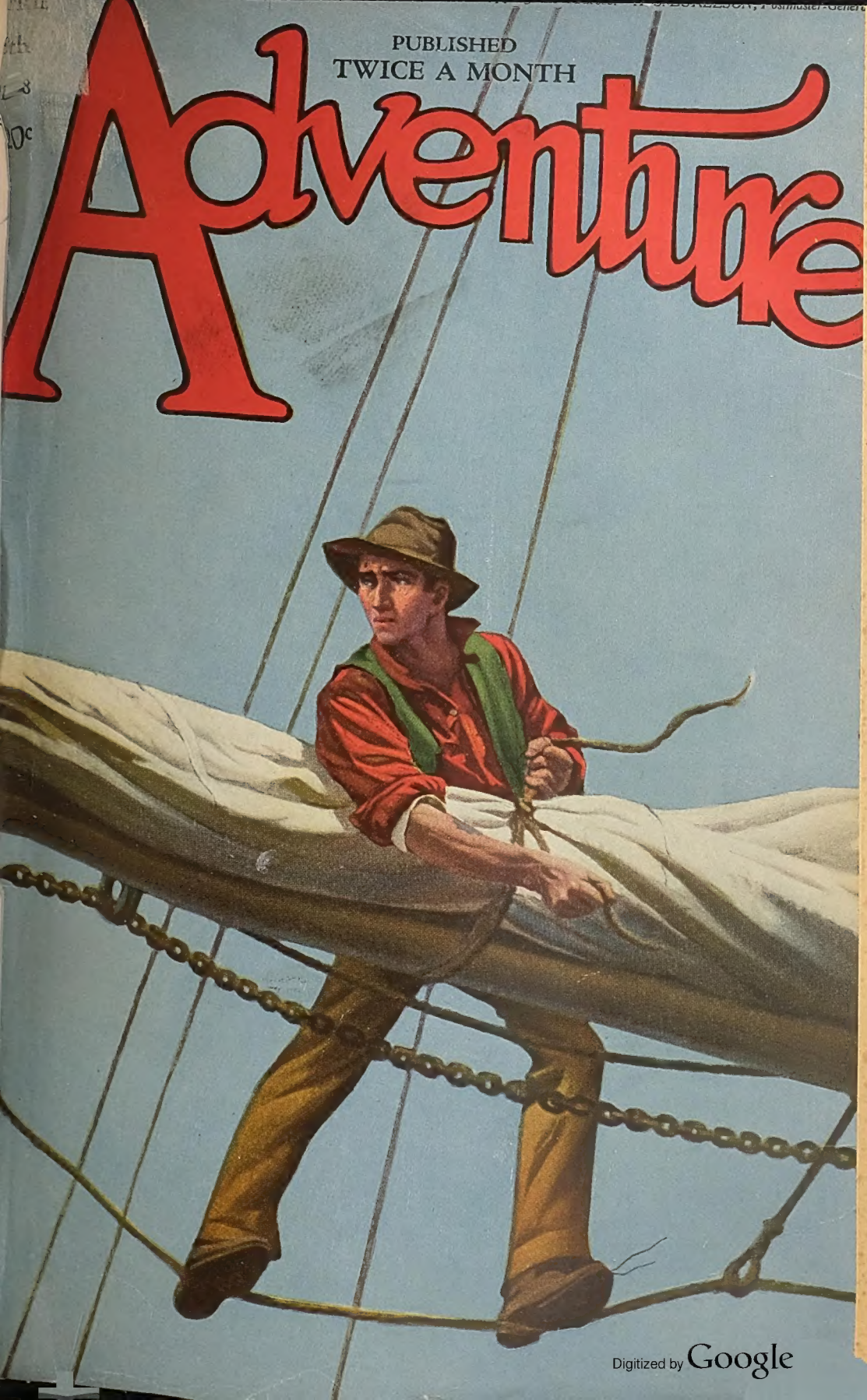

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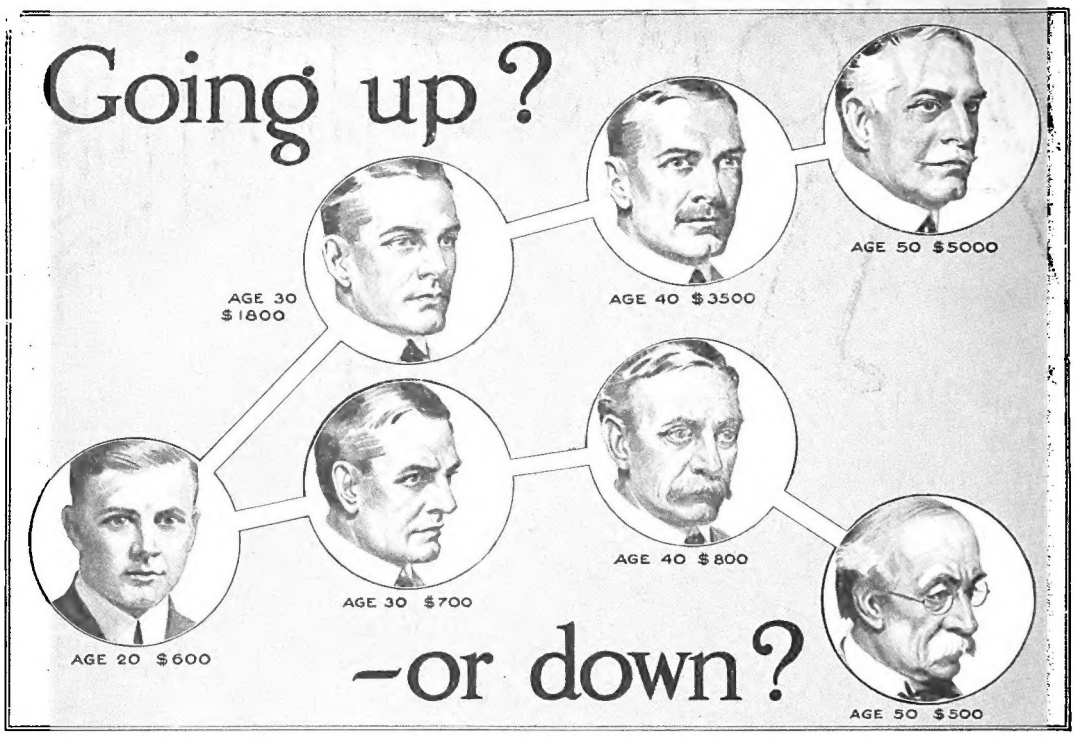

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ADVENTURE

Vol. 17
No. 2

April 18, 1918

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ALSO

GEORGE A. SCHREINER

American War Correspondent, behind the Turkish lines during the siege of the Dardanelles, will give his actual experiences in an article,

WRITING UNDER SHELL-FIRE

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First May Adventure

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APRIL 18 1918 Adventure VOL. 17 NO. 2

THE SIGN OF THE SKULL

A COMPLETE NOVEL

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Petals of Lao-Tze," "Turquoise Cañon," etc.

CHAPTER I

EXECUTION DOCK

Yo-ho and a rumbelow,
Pass the pannikin to and fro.
Lasses to love and guineas to spend,
Pass the pannikin onward, friend.
As long as it lasts us, life is fair
Though it ends in a loop and a leap i' the air;
In a loop and a leap i' the air!

Buccaneer Ballades.

THE fog had come up the river with the tide, mounting slowly in curling wisps of acrid brown smoke that seemed to flay the membranes of throat and eyelids. The gabbling voice of the priest at the foot of the gallows was hoarse, the torches of the link-boys made little crimson blurs in the murk, the white trappings of the marshal's guard that held back the crowd were hardly discernible despite the blaze of the two great cressets on the gibbet platform.

The raw chill of the mist penetrated to my very marrow, which was not overly protected by either flesh or cloth. My stomach was as empty as my pockets and the one friendly act of the fog was the cloak it furnished to my threadbare attire.

Scholar and gentleman, I might fairly term myself, but neither of those attributes seemed calculated to furnish me with a livelihood and I was not far from envying the three pirates who stood between the ladders, joking with the spectators in well-assumed bravado. At least their bellies were full and they had come to the end of all their troubles. For myself there seemed little ahead unless I emulated their example and turned footpad or, if I could steal a horse, highwayman.

In good sooth I was desperate enough for anything, as a man will be when the moralities retreat in the fight for sheer existence.

Big Ben boomed eleven sullen strokes through the funeral pall that hung over all London as if summoned to fittingly attend the execution of the buccaneers. It grew

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thicker and the muttering, coughing crowd edged closer as the priest ceased his exhortations. A ballad-monger thrust one of his bundle of long sheets at me with a whine.

"'Ere y'are, sir. True life hand hadwentures hof the pirate, Thomas Towne! Full hand hillustrated haccount hof 'is hexploits. Penny plain hand tuppence colored!"

I saw that the fog had spoiled the sale of his wares and the last faint hopes of a few shillings for my own purse went glimmering. I had a copy of the ballad in my breast pocket, an author's proof, for I was the anonymous creator of that largely fictitious doggerel and it was the matter of the sale of the sheets that had brought me to Execution Dock.

My landlady had demanded, rather than suggested, that I should employ my scholarship in the composition of the notorious Towne's biography. Her son, employed as printer's devil, had seen to their striking-off and secured a crew of young ruffians to shout them in the hope that the profits might secure easement of my score. The scheme had failed, there would be no welcome for me at my lodgings.

The crowd pressed forward. Bendall, the boatswain of Towne's ship, was about to mount the ladder. Like his mates, he was decked out with long ribbons at his neck, wrists, knees and cap. Halfway up the steps, he paused and turned to the crowd, scuffling off his shoes and kicking them over the heads of the guard into the rabble that fought for the souvenirs.

"I have promised not to die with my shoes on," said Bendall. "What, are there no brave bullies in the crowd to lend a hand to prevent my turning-off? I have known the time when there were many gallant fellows who would not have suffered me to die like a dog.

"Not one? Why then, a murrain on ye for a cowardly pack. Stow your book, Parson. I need no partner for the devil's dance."

The hangman took him by his pinioned elbows and led him beneath the gibbet where the black flag hung heavily and the nooses dangled. Dowling, the gunner, came next, cheerful with the sack they had given him as a farewell libation. He stood swaying on the planks, roaring out the snatch of a piratical ditty in the voice of a bull while the crowd shouted in the chorus.

Madagascar to Malabar,
Over the ocean to Panama.
Nothing to lose and a world to gain,
So, ho, for the Spanish Main!

The spectators were beginning to weld together in a mood that threatened authority. The officer of the guard hurried the carrying out of the execution. More wood and oil were fed to the cressets, Dowling was placed in position, still bawling his chanty until he felt the cold touch of the knot behind his ear and, suddenly sobered, subsided. A hush fell on the crowd as Towne ran lightly up the ladder as if he had been ascending to his own quarter-deck. My neighbors pressed me closely as the mob surged forward.

The man on my left would have been a fitting consort for the murderers on the scaffold. He was clad in soiled leather breeches and coat, a sash about his middle and a handkerchief about his head beneath a woolen cap. He was a burly ruffian, his eyes shining by the reflected flare from the cressets like a wolf's. His seamed face was the color of mahogany, the wings of his broken nose quivered with excitement and his jowls were black with bristles.

"Throw me a token, Tom," he called in a husky bass.

As an act of grace to his rank or his last request, the pirate leader's arms were unbound. He turned his head toward the speaker and seemed about to answer him but changed his mind. He took a ring from his finger and flipped it with sure aim at my neighbor who threw up two great hands to catch the heavy circlet. As the token fell into the horny cup I saw that the thumb of the left hand was missing.

The crowd yelled and Towne began to take off his ribbons and throw them out as souvenirs. One fluttered close to my head and the arm of the person to my right clutched eagerly for it as a stick fell across my toes.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

It was the voice of a boy, strangely refined for such company, but the face seemed that of a man set upon the body of a dwarf, a head of much beauty with large and lustrous eyes and features sharpened, as those of a cripple are apt to be, by pain. One thin leg was bent, a crutch was set beneath the right armpit and the shoulders hinted at a well-masked deformity, pitiful rather than aught repulsive.

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The sight of a cripple has always set me to thankfulness for my own straight limbs, despite of all outward circumstance, and I stooped for and retrieved the stick, a rare one of ebony with a carven handle of ivory.

"No offense," I said. "So you got your ribbon."

"Aye," he answered, his face alight. "'T was Towne's! Look, he is going to speak."

I MARVELED at the warp that seemed to have affected both mind and body to so strange an interest in that spectacle. Beyond the lad an elderly man plucked at his sleeve.

"Come away, Master Frank. Your uncle will never forgive me. You have your token. We shall never win home in this fog."

The boy turned on him petulantly.

"I go when I choose. Keep silent."

The other, a servitor of sorts, I fancied, obeyed as the crowd howled for silence. Towne was speaking. I felt a sudden relief of pressure. The man who had caught the ring had vanished. Then the gap filled again.

"I see," said the pirate, glancing up to where the black flag hung limp on its staff looking as if a raven had perched there in the fog, "that they have honored me by hoisting my own colors. I have lived under them. I am not afraid to die beneath them. I have been somewhat of a plague to his Majesty, I am told. I might have been a greater one and I wish with all my heart that I had been so."

This was rank treason, but it suited the crowd as strongly as it dissatisfied the officer of the guard. There was small doubt but what several of Towne's actual followers and many of his friends were assembled to see the last of him. In the fog a rescue might actually be consummated.

The officer gave an order, the soldiers forced us back, the hangman's assistants seized Towne and set him between Bendall and Dowling; the butt of a fusil was rammed into that lean stomach of mine, the rabble surged like an angry sea with oaths and protestations that ended in a universal gasp as the discharge of a small cannon announced that the bolts had been drawn and three forms showed vaguely through the fog, limp at the ends of the hempen cords.

I had nowhere to go and I drifted with the mob until it dissolved and I found myself practically alone, treading the cobbles of a street of which I knew neither the name nor character, so dense had the fog become, despite the fact that the clocks had not chimed noon. Vague smears of light showed on either side of me from upper windows. If there were any shops they had been shuttered in the lack of trade and the opportunity for plundering.

Save that I was near the river and in all probability in a somewhat unsavory locality, I had no idea of my neighborhood. It was thirty-six hours since I had eaten and my brain had dulled. Naught subdues a man like the lack of prospects and my physical and moral courage were alike at a low ebb in the faintness and nausea that swept over me while I groped for a wall.

I stumbled across the gutter and paving to the houses and clung for a moment to a shutter while my knees forsook their duty and the fog seemed to whirl and roar in my ears. Within a few moments the nausea passed and I got a fresh grip on myself. It seemed absurd that a brain still active, if numbed, could not rise superior to the needs of the body that bore it or at least provide that body with nourishment. I knew well the unfriendliness of the great city and the fog appeared to have the more utterly shut me off from humanity.

I moved on aimlessly, fingers to the wall. The street was silent, the fog unpierced by sound of travel. I touched cold, clammy stone, then felt the corner stones of an archway through which a faint wind wafted puffs of the loathsome mist. Something sniffed at my legs, whined and fawned upon me, lapping with a warm and eager tongue the hand I stretched down to meet the muzzle of a long-haired dog, a vagrant as lonely and—I patted the projecting fence of ribs—full as hungry as myself. So far as I could judge in the fog, it was a Scotch collie, well-maned, with a sloping, narrow skull that told of breeding; collarless and, therefore, masterless.

It was a fortunate meeting, for the one heartened the other. I think that Don—I named him for his Spanish ruff—sensed my condition as I discovered his and the cheery pluck of him, who tried to show me that things could not be so bad when a dog could wag his tail in the face of misfortune,

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took me a little from the selfish contemplation of my own ill-luck. We had just decided upon fellowship when there came a muffled shout and a shriller call of "Help!" out of the dark cave mouthed by the archway where Don had found me.

He bounded off instanter and came back, nuzzling at my shins, so sure of his duty and expectant of my mutual understanding that my weakness sloughed off from me and we set off together blindly through the fog toward the source of the cries, Don ahead, I following.

It was tenebrous as midnight in a dark cellar. I had no weapon; my wind, broken by fasting, gave out the sooner from the rank gulps of fog that entered my lungs. Twice I nearly fell headlong when the shrill cry—at first I thought it that of a woman—sounded just ahead. Then came the snarl of Don, a short bark, the deep oath of a man and the sound of a dog's worrying as the collie closed to combat.

A red flash that came with the report of a pistol discovered the form of a man lying on the ground. I leaped over it and collided with the stout, burly body of some one whose hands clutched at me and groped for my throat in the dark. My sudden rally of strength, born of the spirit, soon faded as I tore at those iron claws, but came back as my own fingers made the discovery that my assailant lacked a thumb. It was the man to whom Towne had tossed the ring. I swung savagely and my fist crashed against the bone of his jaw so that he staggered back. There was a rush in the air between us, hair brushed across my chest and Don attacked.

I feared for steel as the man swore. The dog was as weak as I was and the issue could not long abide. Three things saved us, the fog, the swift fury of our encounter and the fact that the ruffian could not gage our condition. Don was flung back against me, growling, and the man went clattering down the cobbles in retreat toward the arch. I sunk my fingers in Don's ruff and kept him from following.

We were well-nigh spent and we had achieved the main purpose of our sally. The fog hung about us like the folds of a somber curtain. Somewhere a man was lying at our feet, dead perhaps or grievously wounded, and there was the sounder of the shrill cry to be accounted for.

Don subsided and started to snuff, whimpering a little. A voice that seemed dimly familiar spoke in the darkness.

"I thank you, sir, though I can not see you, for your service. Your dog has found my man. I fear me he is hurt and the fault lies with me. Mayhap——"

It was the voice of the crippled lad who had caught the ribbon. Doubtless the burly rogue had perceived as I had, the quality of his bearing and followed when the crowd dispersed. By this time I was kneeling beside the serving man, supporting his head upon my knees while Don licked his face. I heard the click of crutch and stick and knew the lad was beside us. The man groaned, coming rapidly to his senses and struggling to regain his feet as I assisted him.

"Master Frank?"

"I am here, Hudson. All is well, thanks to our friend here and his dog. Are you hurt?"

"Naught but what will speedily mend. My pate is cracked from the fall on the stones. What will Sir Richard say?"

"That," said the lad dryly, "we can find out the sooner for reaching him. Let us get out of this place. There was an archway. If I could find that whelp of a linkboy who deserted us I would have him whipped until he needed a fresh hide to cover him."

The domineering cruelty of the boy's tones spoke of an arrogance bred of spoiling, but I was in no mood to blame him. The world was spinning about me again and I was hard put to it to fight off the faintness through which I dimly heard and understood the brief explanation of Hudson.

"My young master would have it that I should accompany him to the hanging. Then came the fog, when I would have gone home. At the end we found a linkboy to guide us across London Bridge. Belike he was in league with the footpad that attacked us."

"He was the man who stood the other side of me," I answered as I steadied myself. "The man to whom Towne tossed the ring."

"Ah, then you are he who picked up my stick."

The lad's tone had changed. Somehow I sensed that he must have observed my bearing and condition as we stood in the mob.

"My name is Frank Madden, sir. I beg

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that you will accompany us home that my uncle Sir Richard Tretheridge may suitably thank you."

I read charity in that phrase and, though God knows I stood in need of it, resented it with a pride that may be false or sound but is one of the virtues—or vices—that are as much a part of me as the birthmole on my cheek. And I answered, churlishly enough, that I needed no thanks.

"But we may be set upon again before we win to safety in this fog. I am not strong, my servant has been damaged. May I not beg the escort of yourself and your dog? Mayhap I can honorably even the score."

The boy's courtesy shamed me and I said so, giving him my name and Don's.

"Why then, Justin Penrith, an we can find our way to the Bridge, belike we can get a chair and so to home. Your trusty Don arrived in time to save my purse. Sir Richard will be the more glad to see you since you are a Devon man, or is it Cornwall?"

"Devon," I told him, though I did not add that it was in my mind that Sir Richard might not be as cordial as he might imagine.

But I knew him for a man of some importance and reputed fair. It might be that he could put me in the way of some employ, which under the circumstances I could accept without umbrage. In all truth, I was at the end of my rope and looking for a longer one and now I had Don besides myself to provide for.

Don muzzled me with something in his jaws. It was the link-boy's torch, a stout cylinder of tarred paper bound to a stick. Hudson produced flint, steel and tinderbox with a box of sulphur-tipped splints and soon we had the flambeau blazing. I carried it, conscious of the exposition it made of my attire, but resolved to conclude the adventure and cheerfully accept what moiety of fortune might come my way at the ending.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH I ACHIEVE HONORABLE EMPLOYMENT

I WAS my own man again and Don his own dog, myself with my legs still under the table that had served us a pasty washed down with white-wine sack, and Don couched before the leaping fire that was mirrored in the black oak wainscoating. I had even made shift to forget my shabbiness since most of it was hid in shadow.

Young Madden was sunk deep in a padded chair that shrined his deformities. Indeed he was less of a cripple than I had imagined and, with only his cane of ebony, moved nimbly when he had a mind to.

Sir Richard Tretheridge sat opposite me, puffing at a long pipe, clean-shaven, frank and ruddy, well-wigged and dressed as became his rank. The reservation with which he had met the mention of my name, though that in no wise affected his thanks or apparent desire to serve me, still showed in his puckered brows.

"Justin Penrith—of Plymouth, I take it?" he said when the man-servant—Hudson had barely escaped dismissal through the pleading of Madden, who at times seemed to hold the balance of authority rather than his guardian, Sir Richard—had left us.

"The same," I answered.

I knew well what was passing through his mind. My father, first losing his fortune in the ill-fated South Sea Bubble venture, had further embroiled himself by espousing the uprising of the Scottish Jacobites. He had escaped the fate of Derwentwater and Kenmure by falling before Argyle's advance. His death and our fallen fortunes had soon caused my mother to follow him.

Save for a stone house at the head of a barren combe, naught was left of the estate of Penrith but its lone cadet, myself, sans favor and sans fortune, the proscription of my father a ban upon all usual modes of preferment, a scholar of Oxford without purse, sword or patronage, three essentials to the welfare of orphaned gentility in the reign of his Gracious Majesty, King George the First.

"You are loyal?" he asked, in an obvious query. "And a Protestant?"

"As to the last, yes," I answered, and the perplexity of his face lifted a little. "So was my father. For my loyalty, I might be hard set to prove it, having had no opportunity. The cause of the Pretender is a lost one. My father's adherence was, I fancy, wrought rather from the memory of certain favors gleaned in France than from personal convictions. As for King

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George, is he not the son of the granddaughter of James the First? I see no reason why an Englishman should not serve him with loyalty, and I among them. My father paid his score with the bullet that killed him."

"Why, 'tis well said." Sir Richard smiled at me in friendly fashion. "For, mark you, Penrith, though some might count it treason, methinks that loyalty is first of all, good citizenship. One serves one's country foremost. Were Englishmen less loyal under Cromwell the Protector than under Charles the King?"

Which saying I thought then, and do still, was excellent sound reasoning, though later I found it was the offspring of another brain than Sir Richard's.

"Yet," he went on, "I hardly see my way. The cause is lost, but the taint still lingers. Your name would bring more frowns than welcome at court. We leave tomorrow for the home of Mistress Madden, the mother of this young pirate fancier, and my sister, near Hendon."

"There is a simple solution, uncle-guardian mine," said young Madden. "You have often lamented that I had no tutor."

"And you that I should suggest such a person. Heaven forfend that I should offer such a post as a reward."

He spoke whimsically; but, as I caught the trend of their talk, I could readily imagine that the man who sought to control Frank Madden would have no sinecure.

"I would be willing to work, with him," said the lad with an air of graciousness that was amusing.

The boy was somewhat of a malapert, for all his cleverness, yet he possessed a faculty of winsomeness which, coupled perhaps with his physical handicap, drew me to him.

"You are a scholar?" asked Sir Richard.

"I am a bachelor of Oxford, if that counts for learning," I replied. "I would rather mount steed than desk and sharpen my sword than mend a pen, but needs-be is best. I could make shift, I daresay, to impart what knowledge I have gathered."

"Frank is not over-strong," said his uncle. "Your tasks would be out-doors as well as in. What say you? A compensation of fifty pounds per annum, your horse and sundry emoluments. Most of the time would be spent at Madden Hall, a pleasant place enough."

"But lonely," said the lad. "'Twould be less so should you come. I warrant we should get along rarely together. Belike you could teach me how to shoot and ride, maybe to fence. You spoke of sword-sharpening?"

He was out of the chair and leaning lightly on his cane, a wistful look in his big eyes. My heart warmed to him, nor did the sack in my unaccustomed head, the pasty in my grateful stomach and the talk of fifty pounds, a horse and Madden Hall, fail to play their parts in making me view matters in a rosy glow.

"Dost think I could ride a horse and learn the tricks of

> Carricade and sly passata,
> Stramazon and bold stoccata,
> Maudritta to embrocata."

I looked at him in astonishment. Sir Richard laughed.

"The boy is seeped in romance. He has spent his time in reading all that smacks of it from the Iliad to the tales of Drake. If wit and wish could win battles he would be Lord High Admiral."

The lad blushed.

"It is not my fault that my legs are not mates nor my shoulders straight."

Sir Richard was up, one arm about those twisted shoulders.

"Nay, dear lad, forgive me. I was thoughtless."

"Richard the Third could ride and fight for all his hunchback and dragging foot. I have asked Sir Richard to teach me to fence, but he is not often with us. I am not such a weakling and I am sixteen."

"Why, surely," I answered. "You shall fence and ride too. It is the spirit that counts. My father was esteemed the best sword at Louis' court and what he taught me you shall know."

"So, 'tis settled," said Sir Richard. "And now to bed, for we make an early start."

He made me a sign as young Madden left the room, and I lingered.

"Penrith," he said, fairly enough. "Not as to my nephew's tutor, and that state should not belittle you; but as gentleman to gentleman: we leave, as I have said, early. I would gladly advance you moneys for such purchases as you may desire to make. But the shops will not open. If the contents of your portmanteau be not such

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as you might deem suitable for your introduction to Madden Hall, I beg you will let me commend you to my wardrobe.

"We are much of a size, though you have the advantage of me in a leaner waist. A riding suit, at least, a pair of pistols and a small sword. Belike you will have cause to use them as we cross the heath. Some of Towne's rascals are still at large and they tell me are turned land-pirates. Come, a temporary loan from man to man in the accident of the moment?"

It was handsomely and courteously devised and, save for a trick of that false pride of mine, I trust I accepted it in proper mode. We shook hands on it.

Oh, the luxury of those clean, cool sheets that smelled of lavender in which I stretched myself, bathed and shaven and mentally rehabilitated. Sir Richard's man had served me and laid out linen, clothes, boots, belt and small-sword for the morrow. Naught was forgotten, to the feather in the hat and the spurs, for I was to ride beside the carriage. There was even a purse with guineas in it, which I was fain to jingle for long lost acquaintance sake.

It was a swift, shrewd turn of Fortune's wheel for me, the first of many vagrom revolutions of which not all my fantasy of dreams that night foreshadowed the reality, albeit I visioned young Madden turned pirate and running the thumbless desperado deftly through the shoulder with a *"bold stoccata."*

CHAPTER III

WE MEET THE MAN WITH THE WEN

IT WAS October, the trees were russet and gold, the fields bare and the air already sharp with the first threat of Autumn's surrender to Winter. Coming out of the thickness of St. John's Wood, both pole-horses lost a shoe, sucked off by the deep and recent rains. It took two hours delay to find a smith and remedy the mischief. All the way from Holebourne and West-bourne along the great Edgware Highway, the road had been little better than a quagmire so that late afternoon found us toiling up the long ascent of Willesden Lane toward Kingsbury-Neasden, where we were to branch off over Dollis Hill and so, by the heath, to Hendon-by-the-lake.

I rode a good horse, Sir Richard's own mare, the knight having decided to travel in the coach with his nephew. He was still an active man and should have been in his prime had he not permitted a fondness for bed and trencher to sap his out-of-door ambitions and soften his muscles to the point where they proclaimed against unusual activity. I felt for all the world like a man out of prison, the keen wind that made the mare fret at the curb for the first hour or two, the clack of my scabbard against my thigh, the guineas in my pouch, all were in tune with my racing blood.

I was but twenty-seven, geese still looked like swans to me until I came to pluck them, and that ride still stands sharply graven on my memory, as trivial happenings will sometimes cling; aside from what happened at the end of the day and, in a twinkling, spun Dame Fortune's wheel afresh and sent us all adventuring.

Long after the mare had settled down in earnest my heart kept caracoling while I realized that joy only comes through contrast. There is no more contented man than he who has known comfort, lost and found it again, for he has not only attained a proper appreciation but widened his humanity in the process.

I was philosophizing in this fashion, riding ahead of the carriage, which was struggling through a deep cut, high-fringed with elms, that marked the summit of Dollis Hill when a yell from the postilion sent me galloping back to find the carriage mired to the hubs, too deeply for the tired cattle to release. There was the waste of two hours more before, with the aid of my nag, we at last hauled out the post-chaise backward, filled in the muck-hole with stones from the bank and, steeped and spattered with clay, made the rise and rolled downhill toward the heath.

It was sunset when we emerged from the cut, a blaze of crimson underneath masses of slaty clouds that presaged more rain before midnight. In the dusk the road across the heath was scarcely discernible. The soil was thick with heather and broom, with patches of pine woods, and here and there a clump of firs upon a knoll. Some four miles away a lake gleamed ruddy and swiftly changed to the hue of steel, like a shield that had been wiped clear of blood. The eastern sky was a curtain of shifting scud with no stars visible, no moon was

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due until late and we had come to a stage of our travel which suggested that it might be well to look to our pistols.

Hendon Heath and Hampstead Heath, practically a part of the same barrens, were favorite grounds of the knights-of-the-road, the ranks of which, rumor said, had recently been recruited by some of Towne's men. Sailors make indifferent horsemen and these latter would be likely to attack on foot, a method which the played-out condition of our horses would cater to.

Young Madden was agog over the prospect of an encounter. Sir Richard, carrying with him a considerable amount in gold for certain disbursements of the mistress of Madden Hall, was not so jubilant; while for my part, I had no desire to part with my so recently acquired guineas, few as they were.

As darkness swooped on us we lit the lamps. The squashing of hoofs and wheels announced our progress sufficiently to make the attempt of keeping the excuse for a road after nightfall without lights an idle precaution. Highway robbery was a common enough occurrence of travel, particularly as the bite of Winter threatened, and we held a little council of war. The driver had a blunderbuss, though, from the varlet's actions, it seemed doubtful if he would have the courage to use it. The postilion was frankly looking for murder to lurk in every clump.

We decided that I should go ahead as outrider, keeping in touch with the carriage with a sharp lookout for anything suspicious. Your highwayman's main dependence is a surprise, with no heart for unnecessary risks, though seamen turned land-thieves might have stouter courage than the rest. So on we plodded, the mare and I, with Don, who had been contented for the past few hours to ride on the box with the driver, padding beside us through rut and puddle, the post-chaise lumbering behind.

It was eery work, let him who has never drawn sword nor pulled trigger in earnest truthfully attest. I was not sure of my own prowess, though the excitement of it all precluded any question of courage. Certain it was that I achieved the mental condition of the postilion; mayhap I had caught his infection; and a score of times I could have sworn I saw a skulking figure that turned out to be but a harmless furze-bush, and once, when some sheep scurried off, I all but fired the pistol, whose butt lay warm to my palm.

A wind came up and moaned across the moor, once in a while a star blinked at us and disappeared. Midway to Hendon there was an inn of none too good repute, either as to its company or its provender, and presently, from the top of a rise, I saw a light shining like an orange eye across the heath. Then the road passed through a spinney of firs and it vanished.

Suddenly Don *wuffed*, a muffled bark of warning. I could not see him for the pitchy blackness of the place, nor could I see the owl that suddenly flew hooting across the road, so low that I could feel the ruffling of the air beneath its wings. The mare snorted and plunged. Had I not ridden after many an Exmoor deer and red fox, up tor and down combe, long e'er I dreamed of going to London town to seek my fortune, I would have been pitched over her head.

As it was, driving my knees into her withers and gathering up the reins, I could not check the sudden frenzy of her gallop for several paces, and then it was too late. She plunged into a rope stretched tight across the way and went crashing to her knees.

I was out-stirrup and clear before she fell, firing my pistol at some one who crashed down the bank to my left and calling back Don from an encounter where he would be like to get the worst of it. It seemed that all my fighting was fated to be done in the dark. The pistol-fire stabbed the blackness, which closed in deeper than before. The man I had fired at halted, and then I heard him scrambling in the brushwood. Back of me the mare was up, snorting, o'erleaping the rope and galloping down the road with my second pistol in holster. From the opposite bank a voice shouted.

"He's crabbed the net! Down to the carriage, ye fools! There show her lights!"

More crashing through the underbrush on both sides of me, the sound of bodies jumping into the road and running down it toward the chaise, the pale lights of which showed as it entered the spinney.

SWORD in hand, I raced after them, Don, still obedient to my command, leaping beside me, touching my hand every now and then with his muzzle.

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There was a spurt of flame—the coachman had fired his blunderbuss skyward, scaring some crows from their nest. I caught the grate of steel and dimly saw Sir Richard, out of the coach, engaging one of the robbers, the blades glinting by the lamplight, the fighters' shapes blotches in the dark.

The postilion was blubbering with fright in his saddle as I reached the horses, held by a man who fired pointblank toward me. Don's teeth met in his leg as he pulled trigger or there would have been an ending of this story of mine then and there. The bullet went high, clean through the crown of my hat, cutting the quill of the feather and I sent home my point. For the first time my steel was fleshed—in the dishonorable carcass of a rogue.

I can remember still the cushiony resistance of it as I drove in the lunge and the wretch dropped with a groan beneath the plunging hoofs. The coach lurched onward and I sprang toward Sir Richard, whose rapier play was no match for the bludgeon strokes of the ruffian's cutlas. The stout sea-blade whirled up and in another second would have split Sir Richard's skull had my own not taken him in the muscle of his upper arm. With a howl he dropped his weapon and fled, swallowed up by the night.

Coachman and postilion were fighting with the maddened horses, the chaise was tipped sideways in the ditch as we hurried to it. There was a report, the stinging reek of powder and, by the flash, we saw the exultant face of young Madden.

"I've got my man," he said. "I've got my man!"

It seemed as if he had. The attack was over. We found the rogue that Frank had fired at as he tugged at the door of the chaise, held from opening by its closeness to the bank, lying in the ditch, his face, by the light of the lamp, covered with blood. The man that I had pinked lay in the ruts, smeared with mire. It is doubtful whether my thrust would have proved fatal, but the horses had battered in his head and the heavy wheels had passed over him so that he was quite dead when we found him.

"Let him lie, the murdering carrion," said Sir Richard. "They can fetch him in from the inn. It would not surprise me if the keeper was in league with them. A seaman, by his dress. One of Towne's men. You saved my life, Penrith; my arm is not as stout as it should be; that rogue who fled beat all the strength out of it. It tingles yet."

Frank shouted from the chaise. His man was coming-to. The bullet had but scored the bone by the temple, and the blood and the powder-stain had made his case look worse than it was. He was still unconscious though groaning lustily. Frank had one of the lamps beside him as he sat on the carriage step.

"He is a pirate," he said. "See the tattoo on his hand and wrists. I warrant he has a ship in full sail on his chest. He is my prisoner, Sir Richard. I will make him tell me rare tales of the Main and Madagascar."

"He will have short chance to talk save to a priest before he swings for this night's work," said Sir Richard. "I would give much to know if this was a chance attack or if the rogues held information that I was bringing up gold from London. That much he'll confess before we turn him over to the assizes."

"He's my prize," demurred the lad, gazing at the seaman much as he might have gazed at some curious sea-monster cast up by the tide or on exhibition in a Fleet Street gaff. "I will make him tell me all his adventures. We'll take him to the Hall in the chaise."

"It might be best," said his uncle. "I shrewdly suspect to leave him at the inn would be to find him missing tomorrow and he must be questioned. It is high time that the roads were made safe for gentry to travel."

We lifted him into the carriage, no light task with the weight of him. I took off the kerchief about his head to use it the better for a bandage and disclosed a pate, half bald with a great scar running transversely over it, part hidden by greasy locks of grizzled hair that served to cover a purple wen above the right ear. He was dressed in a square-cut coat of black velvet cut for shoulders more genteel than his, the loot of some scuttled merchantman, doubtless; its lacing tarnished, its broad cuffs frayed. His wide breeches were also of stained velvet tucked into bucket-boots of Spanish leather.

A wide belt with a great silver buckle held the folds of a gaudily striped sash in place and supported a hanger in a leather

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sheath. His leathery face was pitted with the pox, as villainous a collection of features as I had then set eyes upon, though I was to see many to match them before long.

The inn was all dark when we reached it and Sir Richard pounded at its door while we all shouted to no end.

"Honest men would have answered," said Sir Richard as he gave the order to drive on. "If I were a magistrate of this county I would have taken his license away long ago. A surly hangdog rogue with a wife who is a fit mate for him. We'll see to it later."

There was no sign of the mare until we presently found her waiting outside the lodge gates, and I mounted the box with Don beside the coachman for the last two miles of our journey.

Mistress Madden—I had pictured her a stately dame but found her a gentle, timid woman, afraid of her brother and the fond creature of her son's whimsies—welcomed us eagerly, still nervous from her apprehensions of our safety. The pirate—as young Madden insisted upon styling him —was secured for the night in a stone house with a heavy door used for the storing of cheeses, after he had recovered consciousness, and Frank had insisted upon feeding him on cold bacon and a stoup of ale.

I noted once more the deference of Sir Richard to his ward's insistencies and marveled at it. But we were all dog-tired and I, for one, was glad to be shown to my chamber, with its great four-poster, in which I speedily found slumber too deep to be overly fretted by any aftermath of the day's excitement.

CHAPTER IV

THE ISLE OF PLUNDER

Sharp sword and short shrift,
Golden loot of others' thrift.
Palm isle and coral reef,
Ho, for the life of a pirate-chief!

Buccaneer Ballades.

I WOKE the next morning with the sun shining through the branches of a great elm and spinning a golden web upon the coverlet of my bed. While the strangeness of my surroundings and the sudden twist in my fortunes was still upon me, there came the tap of crutch and stick outside, a knock on my door, a bark from Don at the foot of my bed and, in answer to my "Come in," the appearance of Frank Madden, his big eyes ablaze with excitement as he seated himself on the quilt.

"Good morrow, Sir Slugabed," he cried. "It is six o' the clock. Did'st sleep well? I warrant your dreams were nothing to the tale that I have heard this morning."

"The pirate?" I queried. "He has not escaped you?"

"Not he. I have him tamed. Besides, I roused up Peter, the groom, who once was pressed to the navy and who held the door. The rest of the house has been asleep while I have learned of kings and scarlet umbrellas, of Andrimanitra, "The Fragrant One," of gold in rocks and gold in bars, of rubies and sapphires, pearls and diamonds, of trees that furnish water for the traveler, trees that have puddings in their pith, sun-birds and crocodiles, weasels three-feet long and tortoises that could bear a house upon their backs!"

"Where are all these marvels?" I asked.

"In Madagascar and its kindred isles. And there is more, much more. What say you to a fortune buried in the sand, the plunder of Portuguese treasure-ships, waiting to be dug up and put to honest uses?"

"What say I? Why, that I will get up to assure myself that I am not still asleep. It is sad to think yon pirate with all his treasure-trove should be reduced to robbing post-chaises in foggy England, where nooses grow overnight."

"Nay, you make a mock of me. And I had counted on you."

He pouted, but the glance he threw at me was shrewd enough.

"Why, so you may," I said as I dressed. "But this talk of plunder seems to me but a specious attempt of your rogue to save his neck. It is easy to talk when one's words are like to be shut off suddenly by a hempen muffler. I think Sir Richard will be of my opinion."

"Sir Richard!" His tone implied small respect for either his guardian's wit or authority. "Come and talk with the man yourself."

"That will I," I answered, falling into his mood, for he was bubbling over and it seemed a shame to spoil his enthusiasm.

Moreover, the talk of gold and precious stones and other marvels was not without

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a response in my own breast. My forebears had sailed with Hawkins and Grenville, the houses of Devon still held strange curios brought from overseas, and the tang of adventure was rightfully in my blood. Loose as the man's tongue might wag, it would be worth listening to. Which serves to show that, as tutor to a lad whose brain was stuffed with romance and whose body, for its crippling, longed the more to break conventions, Sir Richard might have chosen more wisely.

We found Sir Richard up, booted and spurred, pacing the dining-room until his bacon and kidneys were ready, still indignant at the innkeeper and resolved to ride to the tavern first and after to a neighbor, a certain Clifford Brooke who was a justice, to arrange for the disposition of the robber we had left dead in the road, the haling of our captive before the authorities and the planning of a hue-and-cry after the villain who had escaped.

"What's this, I hear?" he said, frowning at young Madden. "You have been gossiping with the prisoner."

"He is my prisoner," replied the lad. "Listen, nunky."

To my surprise Sir Richard appeared to lend a willing ear to the tale that Frank poured out. It was circumstantial and seemed more credible than one might have expected from the imagination of an uneducated seaman.

The buried treasure was that of Towne, the pirate, stubbornly withheld by him since he knew its rendering would avail him little, if believed; hidden on an island to the north of Madagascar, where his own ship had been wrecked, left behind for fear of his rescuer's appropriation, since his own crew was reduced to less than half a score. Sir Richard's eyes showed more than a tinge of greed, a film over them as of reflected gold.

"If 'twere true!" he muttered, tapping his boots with his crop. "What is this plunder?"

"Pearls and other precious stones, bars of gold and ivory. Let us fit out a ship, nunky, with the money that is to come to me, and take this rogue along to guide us."

To my mind Sir Richard did not seem to relish the suggestion of using the money of his ward for such a purpose. He still brooded over the matter, astounding me with his apparent gullibility. I did not then know what secret reasons inclined him to credence of this wild tale.

"Has he the position of this place. Can he show a map?" he asked.

"A map?" The question seemed to take young Madden aback. "That I know not. Should there be a map?"

"It would be a fool's chase else. We will question him—after breakfast. Here come the kidneys."

We sat down, but Frank slipped away, saying that he had already eaten, though I guessed that he disdained to let his stomach stand between him and finding out the existence of a chart to the trove that now occupied his brain to the exclusion of aught else.

Truth to tell, my own appetite was blunted and Sir Richard ate indifferently.

"Stranger tales have proven true," he said. "Towne was known to be a successful pirate. He was taken from an Arab *dhow* in the Mozambique Channel by one of our frigates and he would never tell aught of his lootings, save that all had perished with his ship in a wreck. The two who were hanged with him were equally stubborn."

"So I have heard," I said. "I was his biographer." And I told him of my ballad-making, at which he laughed.

"This will mend all our fortunes, if it holds," he said, and I wondered, esteeming him already a wealthy man, until I recollected that gleam of avarice shining in his eyes.

"How did these others 'scape the gallows?" I asked.

"By turning king's evidence, the shifty curs. Belike they thought to save the treasure as well as their necks."

Sir Richard's dignity did not fancy interviewing the prisoner in the cheese-house, and he accordingly gave orders for him to be brought before us in the library. Mrs. Madden refused to be present, protesting at the mere thought of seeing such a fearful character. Frank was still absent and Peter, the groom who had been a navy-man, was sent to escort the pirate and to bind his arms as a precaution.

Hardly had Sir Richard ensconced himself in a big chair and assumed a magisterial look when young Madden came in with a blithe air.

"There is a map," he said. "It's us for Madagascar-ho!"

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The rascal came in bravely enough, for all his muddy-shabby attire and his bound arms, and stood where he was stationed at the end of the long oak table with a bow for Sir Richard and for me and another that smacked of a fellowship already established between him and young Madden. It seemed evident that the pirate looked to the lad as his sheet-anchor. Sir Richard nodded to the servant to withdraw, which he did reluctantly. Frank crutched nimbly after him to the door and presently threw it wide. The man-of-war's man was caught standing close to the panels and Madden ordered him peremptorily away.

"There's a wise head for 'ee. A wise head on captain's young shoulder," said the pirate. "There's talk atween us that's private, eh, Captain?"

Frank Madden flushed with pleasure at the flattering title the shrewd pirate had tacked on to him, but Sir Richard cut into the latter's assumption of ease.

"Look ye, sirrah," he said sternly. "There's a noose in pickle for ye now for last night's work. What have ye to say for yourself?"

"Naught, my lord, save that I am a misfortunate man, rough in my ways of living and forced to get that living as best I may. 'Twas ill luck that a man that has the worth of ten, aye twenty thousand guineas to my share alone, buried across seas, should be forced to snatch purse for a bite to stay my stomach withal."

"Is this a seaman's yarn, a subterfuge, to save your neck? Dost think to gull us with an old wife's tale?"

"Nay, not your worships, nor even the young captain here, whose prisoner-of-war I am, being bravely ta'en, as it were, in open field and fight. There lies enow to make rich men of all o' us, an' if I speak false, deal me a double death. Hang me, draw me, quarter me and swing me in irons. For I am telling you of the treasure of Tom Towne, richest of all the Brethren of the Coast, and the luckiest, till we met the Scarlet Death aboard the Portugee in Mozambique Channel, just above the line of Capricorn."

THE ROGUE could spin a yarn and already he had us in the web of it, with his sea-tanned leathery skin, his scarred skull with the purple wen on one side of it below the bloody bandage, and his talk of treasure in strange places and of scarlet plagues. He held us on that score and knew it as the angler sees the pike take the minnow to gorge it. Who of us all has not thrilled at the thought of some Tom Tiddler's Ground where gold and silver, to say naught of pearls and other gems, are to be picked up for—and there lies the real bait—nothing?

That avaricious light came into Sir Richard's eyes again. Doubtless mine held the beam to his mote and the lad was frankly enamored of the venture. His was the best excuse, after all, for his physical drawbacks had held him caged from boyish pastimes while his brain had flourished on the sap that should have gone to the making of a husky body, and doubtless his life had been a constant fret against the bars.

Sir Richard palpably unbent. He had taken off his sword and it lay upon the table with its hilt close to his hand. He turned to me.

"Unbind the man, Penrith, and let him take a chair. Frank, let them draw some musty. We will hear this tale of yours, sirrah, but see that you talk with a straight tongue for, at the first sign of shilly-shallying, off you go to the assizes."

The ale was brought and the pirate drained his tankard at one long draft.

"I can talk better when my throat is wet," he said. "Ye speak of assizes and a noose if my tale be false; what gain I, if it be true?"

"It is not for you to dictate terms," said Sir Richard. "Yet we shall use you fairly. So go on."

"My name is Sam Pike and I was born at Chelsea. Among the Brethren they call me 'Chantey-Sam,' because I have always a stave to tip to the men at the capstan or the sheets or in the watches. I'll not tell ye of the time before I fell in with Towne, for 'tis a long yarn and some not fit for the lad's hearing. But I joined him at Maritan, on the east coast of Madagascar, where there has long been a haven for freebooters. White built a fort there, as did Tew, for there is a fruitful plain, and a little river for careening, while the natives, having been employed and fairly treated, are friendly.

"Towne's ship, the *Scourge*, a sloop of eighty tons converted to a brigantine, was in a small cove for the replacing of some rotten timbers. He was ever ready for

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likely men—and no questions asked—and I joined with a full share. Towne took twenty, his mate two, quartermaster the same, with half a share extra for the second mate and the chief gunner. Towne feared no odds and asked no quarter, gunwale or gallows' side, and there was rare booty from the Portugee ships of Mozambique and Gaza Land, from the barks of the Moors and the *dhows* of the Arabs.

"From Lorenzo Marques to Zanzibar, from Zanzibar to Magadoa, and so to Aden, 'twas a likely ground and rare pickings, with a run across the Atlantic to the Spanish Main when things got too hot, as it did once in a while when Towne mistook a British merchant for a Portugee. A rare life of fight and revel well earned, gold mined with a cutlas or a pike and spent like water. And rare lands to live in, with strange birds and beasts, trees that never shed their leaves nor fail of fruit, the blue sea creaming to your bows, a man in the crow's-nest calling "Sail-ho!" and the cry of "Boarders away!"

Young Madden sat with twitching fingers and glistening eyes, sucking it up as a bush takes water after drought. I could vision it all and Sir Richard had unconsciously clutched his sword-hilt!

"We had run over to the Malabar Coast and, near Callequilon, we took an East-Indiaman from Bengal, which we carried in to Callequilon and there put up at sale to a merchant of Porca and a Dutch factor. That was our undoing, for it brought the frigate after us that got us at last. We steered for Madagascar and, at the south end of the channel, off Cape San Sebastian, between that and Bazaruto Isle, we met a Portugee trader. There was debate as to whether we should stop her, for we were bound for Barbados and feared pursuit, but Towne was for chasing her and the thought of more loot decided the matter.

"We looked for a fight, for the ship had gun-ports, and the Portuguese give not up easily, but she did not fire and we reserved cannonade until we sailed close enough to board. Then we entered and they fired but one volley of small-arms at random, which cost us not a single man from bullets, and fled the decks.

"It had been well for us had we done likewise, but here was too rich a prize to estimate her value, with a vast quantity of diamonds and pearls, besides rich woven silks, raw silks, spices, carpets, ivory and wrought and bar gold and dust. This we transshipped, since the prize was clumsy and of little use, and all the time we took no note of the scant number of her crew nor how many lay sick in the forecastle, which stank.

"There was a priest among those sick, and when we ordered the crew to the boats, meaning to fire the prize, he cursed us and we laughed, until he said words that sent cold fear to the hearts of all of us.

" 'Save your curses, Sir Priest, for those who mind them,' said Towne. 'And guard your speech lest I have a mind to slit your throat and spill your vocabulary."

" 'It is not my curse but the curse of God that is among ye,' said the monk. 'Fools! The Scarlet Death is aboard. Half the ship lies dead from it. Ye have breathed it in but ye can not breathe it out again!'

"We fled aboard the *Scourge* like rats from a scuttled hull. That night a cruel storm o'ertook us and it blew so hard that for nine days together we could only carry our courses reefed and were blown northward, back through the channel and many times like to have been wrecked.

"The Scarlet Death went with us. Each hour saw the toll of the dead mount and the quick shrieking and tearing themselves in the fever. These pits on my face are my share of it. Not a man but was marked, save Towne, who ordered his boy to bind his hands to keep him from plucking at his face.

"At last the gale seemed to blow it clear of the ship, leaving but twenty-four out of sixty hands aboard. Half of these were ill and the *Scourge* was barely under hand as we staggered between Johanna and the Zelée Bank, up north, with lee shores spouting and the sea still raging till we cast ashore at last. By this we had consigned ourselves to the devil and had broached a great cask of Amontillado that we might meet him properly ballasted.

"Ten of us woke next morning on the sand, with the *Scourge* piled high on a reef. At first we thought we could take her cordage and ironwork and make shift to fashion a craft from the wreckage, but she broke up fast and we had much ado to get the treasure out of her. The silks and carpets we left, but the gems and gold we saved and piled up on the beach.

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"We were on one of a ring of islands, two of them flat and four with cones in the middle, well-forested, though we could not tell, nor know I yet, whether or not men dwelled there. As luck would have it we found the long-boat, broached but not beyond repair and, in it, Towne proposed to sail to the south for Maritan, burying the treasure and returning for it. It would have been madness to land at the Maritan Colony with an open boat full of gold, aside from its overweight as dead ballast, and to this we agreed.

"So, as Towne's was the chief share, though by this each of the ten was rich for life, he chose the place to hide the trove, with our quartermaster, 'Flipper' Fenton, along to act for us.

"Towne swore he trusted none of us, save Fenton, and, after we had seen that heap of gold and jewels heaped upon the sand, there were few of us who would have trusted the other. Moreover, Towne had the only pistols, and so we loaded the boat and cast lots, and four of us went blindfolded upon it while Towne and Fenton rowed until we came to one of the wooded islands.

"There, in a barrel, swung between poles, the four of us carried that loot, blind as moles, Towne and Fenton guiding us, until we reached a clearing in the trees, where we dug a great hole and buried all that we had brought, fourteen loads from the beach. They bound our eyes again and led us back to the boat and so to the flat isle where we had left our comrades and, to this day, neither I nor any man save Fenton, for Towne is hanged, knows which of the islands holds the treasure."

CHAPTER V

WE SEND A MESSENGER TO LONDON

CHANTEY-SAM stopped, eyeing us craftily and licking his lips. Automatically I filled his tankard, to wet his whistle for more of such pleasant piping.

"But the map, man," cried Sir Richard. "What of the map? You said there was a map, Frank."

The lad looked at the pirate and the latter, full at his ease now, winked at him and at us.

"Aye, the map. But look ye, if I had it, would I yield it until ye had promised me free from scathe?"

"That ye shall have," said Sir Richard. "Your offense was against us and, if your tale is true, it holds your pardon. Where is the chart?"

"I have not ended my tale, but I will be brief. The long-boat was still too leaky for a deep-sea trip, and, while we mended it, came an Arab *dhow* for water and captured us after a skirmish in which one man was killed. They cast us with the rest of the slaves they carried, purposing to sell us. South they bore us. Twenty-four hours later we saw the peak of Ambohitra, which is in the north of Madagascar, in the big toe of that great island which lies like the imprint of a man's left foot upon the sand.

"In the same hour the frigate that was after the *Scourge* sighted the *dhow* and overhauled it for information. The *dhow* fought to save its slaves, but soon surrendered, to our mishap, who found ourselves in the hands of our pursuers to their great delight. Now, a man's life is a precious thing, and, after they had put us to the question, we acknowledged that we were the crew of the *Scourge*. Only Towne kept stubborn and they knew not that Fenton was the quartermaster or knew aught of the whereabouts of the treasure.

"So they let us plain seamen give evidence and hanged only Towne, Bendall the bo'sun and Dowling the gunner, not knowing that Towne had scratched within his ring the exact position of the island nor that Fenton had marked upon the inner leather of his boot with a hot iron the land-bearings of the spot where the loot was buried."

I thought immediately of the ring that Towne had tossed to the rogue at the gallows' foot. But Sir Richard interrupted my speech before it sounded.

"Shrewd work. But Towne is hanged and what use is the map without the position? Marry, my man, your tale lacks point. Where is this Fenton?"

"I can find him. 'Tis pity the longitude and latitude is lost, but remember, the isles are but a day's sail north from sight of the Mount of Ambohitra. True, there are as many isles there as seeds to a gooseberry, yet we can search until we find the group of six and, on one of the wooded four, discover the bearings of the map."

"But the ring is not lost," cried young Madden. "Towne threw it to a man who

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stood next to Mr. Penrith, the man who later attacked me and Hudson!"

"Say you so, young Captain, say you so?" asked Chantey-Sam. "Now what manner of a man might he be? Didst see his hands now? Was there a thumb gone on one of them?"

"On his left hand," I answered.

"Why then, 'twas Flipper Fenton! Thumbless Tom! A cunning rogue! Trust him to be there. Foxy Fenton! So, we have all."

Somehow I thought that Chantey-Sam's excitement was forced.

"How was it that you were not at the hanging?" I asked. "And what good will it do us since Flipper Fenton has map and position alike? Why should he not sail and raise the loot himself? Why give it to us?"

"Aye," said Sir Richard. "Why not?"

Young Madden's face fell.

"Gently, my masters," said Chantey-Sam. "Gently. Ye fire questions at me like a broadside of partridge. Why not? For a hundred good reasons. Can Fenton navigate? No. Where would he get him the money to charter ship and captain to provision it, to pay his crew? Ye say that he attacked the young captain here, being driven to it, like myself, for lack of victuals, for all his map and reckoning. Even now he is in hiding from the runners. Captured, he would be given short shrift as one of Towne's men. I can handle Fenton. I know the earth that fox will run to.

"As for my being at the hanging, I had not the heart to see the turning-off of my old comrades. I may be rogue and villain but I have some feelings. Fenton was there for a purpose, one that will serve our turn. Give me forty-eight hours and I will bring Fenton to ye, or the map and the reckoning."

"Pish!" said Sir Richard. "You are a cozening varlet, who thought your tongue could save your neck. What, man, dost think I would turn you loose? Call for Peter, Penrith, we'll turn him over to Squire Brooke."

"Nay, uncle," pleaded young Madden, loath to see his dream dissolved, as I was. "Mayhap we could send a messenger. Could you not find one, Sam?"

"It might be managed," grumbled the pirate. "Here I put gold at your fingers'-ends and ye treat me as a lying fool. But we must be careful who we send. Hold me in ransom, clap me in the bilboes, an you choose, but let me send a man who can talk our lingo, and so get through to Fenton, and I will have him here within the two days or tie the knot for my own swinging."

"Who is your messenger?"

"He shall not be harmed?"

"Not if he proves trusty in this."

"Then get me speech with Simpkins."

"The tavern-keeper? I thought he was mixed up in this affair of ours last night. I like ill to treat with rogues of his kind."

"But Fenton may find a ship, nunky," said Madden.

THAT settled it, if indeed Sir Richard had wavered. Chantey-Sam was sent back to the cheese-house, Frank as escort, with a mouth full of questions, while Sir Richard bade me make ready to accompany him to the inn. As we rode by Chantey-Sam's impromptu prison, we heard his rough sea-voice lifted for the edification of young Madden and both paused to listen.

Oh, this is the story of Timothy Lee,
As gallant a lad as e'er sailed on the sea,
To make him a fortune and settle him down
With a wife in the suburbs of old London town.

Ho, yo-ho, with a rumbelow!
Pipe all hands for the grog below.

He worked as a seaman and did as he ought,
But outside of curses his work brought him naught;
So he joined with some free men and boarded a hull
And sailed 'neath the flag with the Sign of the Skull.

Ho, yo-ho, with a rumbelow!
Give us some rum for the watch below.

They harried the Spaniards and captured their gold,
A-sailing the ocean, these mariners bold.
Then Timothy married a maiden so fair,
You never did see such a notable pair.

Ho, yo-ho, with a rumbelow!
Our throats they are dry as the bone of a crow.

The maiden soon spent all of Timothy's loot
And with it her loving soon vanished to boot.
So Timothy hitched up his breeches again,
With a yo-ho, my hearties, and sailed for the Main.

Ho, yo-ho, with a rumbelow!
Nothing like rum to put hearts in a glow.

Now this is the moral that goes with the tale,
It is better to be on a wreck in a gale,
Than to travel ashore with a leak in your purse,
For love without guineas is naught but a curse.

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Ho, yo-ho, with a rumbelow!
Tip up the puncheon and let the rum flow.

So yo-ho, my hearties, and haul in the sheet,
A sailor's best friend is his vessel so fleet.
The wind's in the sail and the tide's flowing free,
And we're off to the Indies with Timothy Lee.

Ho, yo-ho, with a rumbelow!
Give us more rum in our lockers to stow.

Now women are plenty as fishes in Lent.
You are sure of their love—till your money is spent.
And when both are gone you can get more again;
So it's hitch up your breeches and ho, for the Main!

Ho, yo-ho, with a rumbelow!
When we get drunk lay us out in a row.

Peter was on guard outside the door, armed with Chantey-Sam's own hanger.

The lad's clear tenor in the chorus ran through the pirate's sea-bass like a thread of silver in a sacking web.

"A lively dog," said Sir Richard. "What think you of his yarn?"

"I shall think better of it when I see Fenton and the map," I said. "Moreover, this Thumbless Tom is not like to hold map and ring for keepsakes. He intends to use them."

"Aye, but there I think Chantey-Sam spoke sooth. Fenton would not be like to trust another pirate, much less a ship's crew of them. And it takes money to outfit a ship. How much, I hardly venture to think."

The reflection seemed to throw him into brooding from which he roused himself only when we reached the tavern. Once there he was brisk enough. Simpkins merited the description of "hangdog," accented by a most villainous squint. This last he used to his advantage, for you could not tell whether the rascal was looking at you or evading you.

"Why did you not answer my knocking last night?" demanded Sir Richard.

"I admit none after door's closed," he answered surlily. "There's no trade o' nights and I dowse the glim early."

"And sleep oversound, it seems. Yet this gentleman saw a light in your windows as we entered Reynard Spinney."

"He must have seen a star through the trees," grinned Simpkins.

Sir Richard grew scarlet with choler at the lie but, if we were to use the man it were bootless to antagonize him, and he mastered his ire.

"Look ye, Simpkins," he said. "I have in custody one of the rascals who attacked us last night."

It was evident that this was no news to the tavern-keeper.

"What's to me?" he asked.

Sir Richard changed his tune.

"Gold, mayhap."

"Gold?"

The man's demeanor changed, caution struggling with the greed with which he mouthed the magic word.

"Chantey-Sam needs ye, at the Hall. Ye are to serve as messenger to London and back, in his service—and mine."

"To Lunnon? 'Twill take two days. What of my business?"

"Trade is slack, ye say. Come, there's five guineas in it."

"Who pays?"

"I do."

"Why then, if 'tis to serve you, Sir Richard. Jenny!"

His slattern wife, who had been watching us covertly from the window, came out.

"Tend tavern. I'm off to Lunnon for his Worship. Wait, sirs, and I'll ride to the Hall with ye."

"With us? Behind, varlet. At twenty paces."

Simpkins slunk off, his squint almost straightened by curiosity.

"If we consort with rogues we must needs expect familiarity," said Sir Richard. "We must have a care lest this Simpkins become too inquisitive."

The same thought was in my mind in this fashion—that secrets breed maggots, and that flies buzz.

CHAPTER VI

THUMBLESS TOM FENTON

FOR the next two days Sir Richard and I simmered. Young Madden continued to boil over like a pot on a forced fire and Chantey-Sam Pike seemed thoroughly content, roaring out his sea-ditties in the cheese-house, with Peter pausing in his sentry-go to listen and grin and Frank Madden, likely enough, inside, perched on a shelf and seasoning the contents of his brain-pan with strange sauces.

The crude sea-songs, like those of peasants, seemed to crystallize all that was most attractive in the calling of which they

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were conceived and many a time I caught myself harkening, as a boy does at a hollow sea-shell, to the wonders of the deep and longing to see them myself.

Sir Richard had behaved right handsomely concerning the search, if we took it up.

"It was as tutor you came to Madden Hall," he said, "and, though I fancy that the seeking after treasure-trove will be more to your mind than construing Greek and Latin with Frank, yet it is not fair that the same terms shall hold. The fifty pounds still runs, as I shall hope that you will keep an especial eye upon Frank, who is inclined to be overventuresome, but, above that, I have talked with my ward, whose money will back this undertaking, and he is agreed that five parts of any hundred shall be yours."

I thanked him and voiced a doubt that had hung in my mind since it seemed likely that we were to embark upon the expedition. I held my own theory as to the foolhardiness of such a venture from a standpoint of mere profit, but it was not for me to quibble with anything that so well suited my own inclinations and was offered to me on such excellent terms. But I wondered whether Mrs. Madden was to be easily won over to the plan and I mentioned the matter.

Sir Richard frowned a little.

"She will not interfere when it comes to the point," he said. "I shall talk with her when our plans are nearer maturing but, for the present, it would be better not to discuss it openly. It may all come to naught."

I could see from his expression that he trusted that nothing would prevent the trip. That the man had something on his mind that troubled him was evident and I guessed that Frank Madden knew the nature of it. But it was none of my affair and I dismissed it.

Meanwhile the lad was at me to teach him sword-play. Attack, of course, he could not, but I thought that some trick of parrying might content him.

But, after the first essay, the consciousness of his own lack of agility and strength dissuaded him and he gave it up, bravely enough, though I could see the tears of vexation standing in his eyes.

"They say to know one's weakness is to achieve strength," he said. "At such rate I should soon become a very Goliath, Justin?"

"Why not?" I asked.

That afternoon we took a riding lesson on a steadfast mount that Peter leathered with convenient stirrups. Frank did better in the saddle and the exercise brought a flush to his pallid face, though he tired early.

"I want to learn navigation," he begged. "Know you aught of it? Sam is to mark off a compass for me and teach me to box it but he knows little of calculations. At least I can learn to set a course and find position on a chart."

I knew something of such things, though my navigation had been of an amateur sort in cockboats and lug-sailed open craft about the Devon coast. But the salt in my blood had always given me an appetite for seacraft and I had learned to handle sextant and work out my reckonings. Instruments we lacked, but I explained the principles and never teacher had apter scholar.

The lad's brain was as beforehand as his body was lacking. There were certain quirks to his mental processes, queer views of general moralities, to be expected perhaps; but he leaped unerringly to conclusions and grasped information surely. Adventure, he craved for as a child cries for its milk. The bitterness of being denied the activities of other boys had bitten deep and showed itself at times and, since he could not achieve the best of a humdrum existence, he ached to skim the cream of wide occasions.

Chantey-Sam represented to him the pith of romance and I could not check, wisdom though it was to do so, the close relations between them. The boy was wilful and he had been spoiled, moreover he had a spirit that flamed in the shell of his body and vented itself at the tiniest loophole of opportunity.

And there was a reserve to him that I could not fathom nor break through, a stubborn will that balked at authority and mistrusted friendship. His brain was mature far beyond his years or his physical development. But I did the best I could to win his liking, finding the path easiest when I could teach him something that his humor wished to acquire.

Toward the evening of the second day after the departure of Simpkins, a post-

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chaise, daubed with the dirt of fast travel, brought a visitor for Sir Richard, a man named Simeon Levison, a portly person whose worldly consequence showed in his miniver-lined coat and display of jewelry. He was thankful for his safe arrival and the postilion openly scoffed to Peter—who carried it to Frank—at his fear of highwaymen; yet, with Sir Richard, he assumed the airs of an equal, at which I marveled, seeing the man was a Jew.

"My guardian-uncle's man-of-business," said Frank and seemed about to say more but checked himself, with a smile at the thoughts he held back.

Sir Richard closeted himself with Simeon, giving orders that the guest would stay the night. Twice, happening by the library, I heard stormy words passing. At nine o'clock Sir Richard sent for me. Young Madden was abed and I was thinking of following his example, but staying up on the chance of Fenton's arrival.

The visitor gave me a scant nod, gathering up a pile of papers that had been scattered between the two of them on the table.

"If this man Fenton comes," said Sir Richard, "receive him for me. See what he has to offer. I shall be closeted with this—gentleman—for some time."

His hesitation over the word "gentleman" had been of the slightest but it had provoked a fleeting sneer and a flash of Simeon's almond eyes that betrayed the temper of the man. There was a hint of mastery in it that I wondered at. Indeed there were many hints about the household that I set aside as none of my concerns but yet left a taint of mystery, a conviction that all did not go as smoothly between nephew and uncle as the surface showed.

IT WAS ten o'clock and I was seated in the "snuggery," half gun-room, half study, when Hudson announced the arrival of two men. The old servant's face showed plainly the puzzled dislike that such visitors should be permitted.

"'Tis Simpkins, from the tavern, and another rogue with him," he said, then lowered his voice. "And the second is the varlet that stood nigh us at the hanging and later attacked Master Frank and myself. Shall I summon Peter with a weapon?"

I shook my head.

"Show them in. They are to see Sir Richard later."

He left, shaking his head in disapproval.

"Thumbless Tom Fenton" failed utterly to recognize in me the poverty-stamped derelict that had stood beside him at the execution of Towne. He touched the forelock that hung down beneath his cap and scraped his foot. Both men were spattered with mud from sole to crown.

"We rode post-haste," said Simpkins. "Nor even stopped at tavern as we passed."

I took the hint and ordered ale.

"You may go," I told Simpkins when he had wiped away the drops of his last swig at the tankard. "If we need you we will send for you."

"There was a matter of five guineas," he said.

I paid him from my own purse and dismissed him.

Fenton was drying and warming himself in front of the fire. A bailiff would have arrested the man on sight. Brute and bully were stamped clear upon his face, low cunning shone in his eyes. He was the type who would steal pennies from a dead man's eyes and esteem them as lucky pieces.

"Where is Chantey-Sam?" he asked, looking about the room in mingled suspicion and appraisal.

I caught sight of the butt of a pistol projecting from the sash beneath his belt and, close to it, the haft of a knife. Back of me, trophied on the wall, was a magnificent Spanish rapier, unsheathed, and I felt more at ease as I noted how quickly I could grasp it.

"Ye shall see him presently," I said, being minded to see how close their tales would tally. "Have you brought the map and the ring?"

"They are where I can get them."

There were no rings on his fingers but two gold circles in his ears. I looked at his boots and he laughed.

"Didst think I would bring them with me? There are first terms to be settled."

"And assurances," I capped him. For we had made up our minds that Fenton must be given no chance to deal double with us.

"What better assurance need ye than chart and reckoning?"

"If we buy the originals we must be certain that there are no copies."

"Blood and wounds! Do ye take me

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for a cozening rogue, a shuffling cheat?"

He glared at me with a fierce assumption of honesty assailed which was ludicrous.

"Them that deals fair with me I play a straight game with," he said. "Look ye, I am putting my neck in jeopardy for this. One chance at a time is all I take. If 'twas known that Fenton of the *Scourge* was hawking the whereabouts of the treasure, to find which they twisted Towne's thumbs with cords until they burst, what would they do with me? Had I not the tip from Sam Pike that ye were honorable gentlemen, and not above a square bargain, I would never have boarded ye.

"Blood and fury, man, I have carried that map against my calf for weeks to hold its secret. You gentles might as easily play false with me as I with you. There are two edges to this cutlas. Give me your sworn oaths that I go clear and pay me five thousand guineas and map and ring are yours. If not, the bargain's off."

"And Chantey-Sam swings for highway robbery."

"I know naught of Sam Pike's troubles. I have enow of my own to mend."

"We will give you a fair share of the treasure when we find it."

"Ye mean for me to sail with ye?"

I nodded. We had talked the matter over. It was a risk to take the scoundrels with us, lest they affect the crew we shipped, but the risk was greater to leave Fenton, at least, behind, with the power to resell a copy of the directions.

"I'll none of it."

"Why not?"

"Sink me, I have a hundred reasons. What if the treasure be taken? The frigate knew the group from which the Moors took us. They may have dug up the islands ere this and, by a lucky chance, found it. Then I am out my map and ring for they will be valueless. Aye, I am fox, not rabbit."

"Yet such a possibility lessens its present value."

" 'Tis not a likely one, but I take no hazards. I have spilled blood and seen my own start, I have had hard knocks and little to show for them. Come, I will tell ye, man to man, that I am tired of pirating. Towne is dead and many a bonny man has gone to the gallows of late. I am through with living with my neck in a noose that may be jerked tight at any moment. There are too many king's ships on the trail. I am an old fox and I want to die in my own hole.

"Look ye, Mate, I'll tell ye sooth. There is a woman in the case. Dost think a man never yearns for a bit o' solid land to call his, to sleep in a bed nights and have a wife for comfort? I am sick of plowing the sea for a grudging harvest. I've seen all the salt water, and swallowed it, that I care for. Five thousand guineas—that's but the shaving of my share that lies buried—and I'll settle down. There's a tiny farm in Kent, with cows and cherry-trees——"

I laughed. He had overdone it. He had been palpably lying from the first, but the idea of this horny-handed, black-hearted ruffian, who one moment boasted of letting blood, talking the next of picking cherries and milking cows, was too rare a picture for my control. His face went purple with sudden passion.

"A murrain on ye for a grinning coxcomb," he cried. " 'Tis a plant! Where is Sam? I'll say no more till I talk with him."

"You've said too much already," I answered, nettled by his blustering. "Sir Richard will make final terms with you, but sail with us ye will."

"Say ye so?"

His hand inched toward his belt and I measured the space to the rapier hilt. I had little fear of his pistol. Flintlocks, save for the invention of the month, that placed the flint in the hammer instead of the pan, were too slow at firing for a man quick on the parry.

"I saw Towne toss ye the ring," I said.

"What of it?"

"I stood beside ye as ye caught it. It was I who thwarted your robbery in the fog. 'Twas the ward of Sir Richard whom ye attacked."

"A plant!" he roared as he leaped to his feet. "Blast me, but I suspected it."

He leaped back with catlike agility, a bull of a man suddenly turned panther, lithe and swift, his hand flashing to his belt almost too fast for my eyes to note as I, too, catapulted from my chair, gripped the rapier's handle and whirled.

The pirate gave one glance at the window, marking his line of retreat, and then his arm jerked from the elbow and his knife came toward me like an arrow. I stooped,

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one hand touching the floor for leverage, and swung my blade at the streak of light. Sword and knife met fairly with a clash and the lighter weapon, deflected, shot, point downward, to the planks where it stuck, quivering, as I leaped and lunged.

His pistol was out but I had him. The knowledge of it showed in his eyes. The next moment would have seen him pinned like a cockchafer to the wall. I had lunged in tierce, to take him through the shoulder, not being minded to kill the goose that had not yet shown us the golden eggs, and he shrank as he raised his weapon.

My blade went up. The door from the library had opened suddenly and Sir Richard, sword in hand, backed by Simeon, had entered and struck up my steel. Simeon grasped a pistol in a shaking hand yet I saw that those almond eyes of his were keen enough, the man's timidity was ingrained but his brain was in control.

SIR RICHARD wheeled upon Fenton who had lowered his pistol and stood sullen against the wainscoating.

"Now, sirrah, what means this?" he demanded.

"A plant," muttered Fenton. "Yet I swear 'twas Pike's fist that penned the message. I'll slit the traitor's throat for him, if I swing for it. And the rogue's who brought me here."

"Silence," ordered Sir Richard. "Drop that pistol. Levison, you will excuse my private business."

He held the door for the other to pass back into the library which he did, with an equanimity belied by the inquisitiveness that shone in his glance.

Sir Richard flicked the pistol across the floor with the point of his sword and I picked it up and placed it on the table.

"Why at sword's-point, Penrith?" he asked.

"The man feared a trap and attacked me," I said.

"If 'tis no trap, then show me Pike," growled Fenton. "I have played fair. Now meet me on a level deck."

"There is no trap, man," said Sir Richard. "Pike, whom we hold for robbery, tells us for his ransom a tale of buried treasure of which ye hold the key. This, mayhap, we will purchase. I——"

The door to the passage opened and young Madden, half-dressed, his eyes like lamps in his sleep-flushed face, crutched his way in.

"Fenton has come and ye did not wake me," he said reproachfully, his gaze rapt on the pirate. "Have ye the map—and the ring?"

Thumbless Tom's features relaxed from their sullen puzzle at sight of the lad.

"Belike I was hasty," he said, "but a man in my shoes can be none too careful. Aye, young master, they shall be forthcoming, as soon as I have talked with Pike."

"I will send for him," said Sir Richard. "I must speak with my visitor."

There was a brief murmur of voices in the library and then we heard Sir Richard in the passage, giving order to Hudson for Chantey-Sam to be brought to us. Meanwhile, Frank, perched on the table, opened an excited fire of talk on Fenton. The pirate seemed to have regained confidence and, as had happened with Sam Pike, boy and buccaneer seemed to instantly find some mutual ground of friendship.

"Are there really giant weasels there, in Madagascar? And great tortoises?"

"Aye and many other marvels, as ye shall see with own eyes. Precious stones and corals, ivory and gold enough to fill this room, lad."

A question hung in my mind that I could not dispose of. Why, being in possession of so valuable a map, should Fenton fear a trap? The only answer that suggested itself was that he had lied to me and that chart and ring were both upon his person. So it proved presently when Sam came in.

"What, my hearty!" cried Chantey-Sam.

"Hey, bully!" answered Fenton.

They gripped hands and smote each other on the back and grinned at each other in a manner that smacked of an understanding or a liking deeper than I had looked for between such rascals.

"So," said Sir Richard, who had entered with Sam, "ye see there was no trap, Fenton. Hudson, show Mr. Levison to his chamber and wait on him. Bring word when he has retired. And send some one with a bowl of sack."

I could see plainly enough that Sir Richard's man-of-business was not to be let into this affair. The sack was brought and Frank insisted on his share, giving us the pledge, beside himself with excitement as he held up his flagon.

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"Bullies all, here's Madagascar-ho!"

The two pirates roared in concert as they clinked their measures together.

> Ho, yo-ho, let the wind blow,
> Haul in your slack and let the ship go.
> Shake out a reef and let the crew know
> We're sailing for Madagascar-ho!

It was queer company, a knight, a scholar and a crippled lad, the three of us of gentle degree and sworn by that gentility to the observance of law and order, hobnobbing and heel-tapping with a pair of as villainous cutthroats as ever swabbed a bloody deck; brought together by the magic touchstone, lust-of-gold, tinctured with the zest of adventure.

"Now," said Sir Richard at last, "where is this map and ring?"

"Shall be forthcoming," said Thumbless Tom, "when my price is agreed upon. Five thousand guineas and a free quittance from any grudge against me account of that affair in the fog. Cash for the first and your words on it for the last."

"Five thousand devils!" exploded Sir Richard. "Why, 'twill take all of that to charter ship and stock it. I know not where to raise that sum."

"Surely I have plenty, nunky," suggested Frank.

"Aye, but all this is a game too chancy to risk too high stakes. Moreover, cash is not so easy to secure. Your moneys are in investments. There is talk of war with Spain. I had much ado to get the gold I brought with me that Sam Pike here coveted."

"Your man-of-business is above, in the guest-chamber, nunky. Belike he can arrange it easily enough."

There was resentment in the glance Sir Richard flashed his ward but the lad smiled back at him.

"At all events," went on his guardian," five thousand is far too great a sum. We provide the ship. Ye say your share is much more than that, according to ship's division. Well then, we'll double it. We take all the risk. If the treasure should not be found, why you're out nothing, but we are."

"Five thousand," persisted Fenton, growing surly as he swallowed another bumper of sack. "Take it or leave it, and, mark ye, I stay behind."

We haggled for an hour till fresh candles had to be brought in by the sleepy Hudson who had long since seen Levison in bed for the night. Fenton, at the end, reduced his price to two thousand guineas in hand. The boy would have given more but Sir Richard was in stubborn earnest.

"And you sail with us," he insisted.

"Why then, if Pike sails, 'tis all one to me," said Fenton, "providing we have another bowl of sack. So, we shall be shipmates once again, old dog."

"Aye," growled Pike, his head limp on his thick neck and his eyes bloodshot with the liquor he had consumed. "Draw up the articles and bring in t'other bowl of sack, and then we'll to bed.

"Do we sail from port of London?" demanded Fenton. "If so, I can help thee to choose ship and find you a live crew."

He shot a side-glance at Pike as he spoke and I saw the return flash that intimated that Chantey-Sam was not so deep in his liquor as he seemed.

"We sail from Plymouth," said Sir Richard. " 'Tis in my own county and that of Mr. Penrith here. It will be hard if our friends can not furnish us with a stout ship and willing hands at a fair rate. There must be no talk of the object of the trip nor doubt of loyalty."

It was hard to be certain by the candles, but it seemed to me that the faces of Fenton and Pike grew less cheerful at this determination. But Fenton answered willingly.

"Aye, aye, your Worship. 'Tis easy to see ye understand how to handle matters. Now, as to the two thousand guineas. When do I handle them?"

"Within the week, if map and ring warrant. You have my word on it."

"Word's enough, so there's an end to't."

With a sly glance at me, Thumbless Tom groped in the bosom of his shirt. At the end of a chain of braided hair there swung a ring of soft gold, nearly half an inch broad. This Frank seized eagerly. Next came a square of leather, the edges showing recent slashing from a greater bulk. One side held the wear and rub of usage that had dulled and marred its original stain of crimson. On the other, tanned to natural color, lines and letters had been scored with a heated point, burning in the marks.

"It has ridden my calf for these many weeks," said Fenton, with a wink and a nod. "I spoiled a good pair of jackboots when I

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cut it out, save that the toes were gone and the heels nubbed."

He laid the map on the table and we all leaned over it.

CHAPTER VII

TREASURE-TROVE

THE map was crudely sketched. At the lower left-hand corner was a key-drawing of the group with an anchor pointing to the isle that held the treasure. The bulk was taken up with the chart of that place. The island was much of the shape of an ivy leaf—one deep indentation to the north and a central cone, marked Mount Towne. To the west of the long bay a creek flowed into the inlet from a ravine on the south side of which were woods.

Here was the clearing, with a spring and a rock marked with a cross—the burial place of the trove. Another smaller creek rose from the clearing and ran southwest to a landing-place. Another landing was indicated at the mouth of the longer creek. Lastly, a note read—

from spring S. E. b S. to rock 38 paces.

I could vision a pit yawning at the foot of a great stone, the tropic sun shining on a rotting, splintered chest from which issued a golden glare, broken by rainbow points of light from sparkling gems. Sir Richard's face was tense as he took the ring from Madden and then passed it to me to see the figures scratched inside.

60-32 E. x 9-24 S.

The magic marks were deeply scribed in the soft metal. The edges were yet somewhat raw where the graver had bitten. The reckoning was close enough, lacking seconds, to fetch the group. After that the map would guide us. It looked like plain sailing.

"There is a book of maps in the library, Penrith," said Sir Richard. "I looked them up yesterday. His voice was harsh with excitement. "It is on the table."

I found it easily, a portfolio of loose maps by the famous French cartographers, Claude and Guillaume Delisle and Bourguignon d' Anville, with others by Mercator and lesser names. Sir Richard took the two that lay on top and spread them on the table. They were Mercator's chart of the world, made in 1569, and d'Anville's late map of Africa, side by side, on the same sheet with Rigafetta's chart of the same region in 1591.

Eagerly we looked for and found Madagascar, laid down on Rigafetta's charting as San Laurenco. What I most looked for was meridian markings. Rigafetta showed the island to lie between 75 degrees and 85 degrees longitude but d'Anville agreed with Mercator in shifting it to the sixties. Mercator's line of 65 degrees ran through the southwest corner of Madagascar and d'Anville's line was 60 degrees.

In latitude all three practically coincided, placing the northern cape close to 10 degrees south of the equator. D'Anville was the real authority. His map showed Mozambique and Zambese, on the mainland of Africa, and, at the northern end of the channel a scattering group of islets. Mercator's projection gave more to the north of the island itself where should lay the cluster that we sought.

"What think ye of it?" Sir Richard asked me.

At such a moment hope is apt to override judgment and faith is born of desire. I looked at the lad's wistful face, at the gleam in Sir Richard's eyes, at those two hard-bitten villains, every jot of whose appearance in conjunction with the trial and hanging of Towne made the tale plausible, tried to assume an air of wisdom as I once more looked at map and ring with a head dizzy with excitement, and laid them down again.

"The reckoning accords with accredited charts," I said. "If ring and chart are genuine——"

"Genuine?" roared Fenton. "Didst not see the ring tossed me by Towne with your own eyes? Is not that leather from my own sea-boots? Did not I, Tom Fenton—Flipper Fenton—quartermaster of the *Scourge*, make the drawing on the spot? Would I run this neck of mine into fresh peril and sail with thee on a fool's errand? My word is as good as another's. Blood and wounds, what more want ye?"

"Aye," growled Chantey-Sam. "Do we not sail with thee? Can clap us under hatches at journey's end if we lie, and there's an end to us."

Frank ended it.

" 'Tis settled. We sail. Now then, three cheers and a huzza."

He led them and the two pirates joined with him so that the house must have rung

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with it. I wondered what Mrs. Madden would think of it if she were awake. Her timid face had been worried for the past twenty-four hours. Levison, I fancied, in his chamber above would lie with those almond eyes of his open in the dark, puzzling over the situation. I did not like the man. He had an air of more than equality, almost of mastership in a quiet way that matched an idea of mine that Sir Richard was fearful of something he might say or do. Sir Richard's face was hard-set as he listened to the cheers with a frown, fingering the map and ring nervously.

Fenton and Pike, bearing the remnants of the sack, went together to the cheese-house for the night, where we saw them safely locked in, though there seemed no special cause to doubt their faith from now to sailing-time. The last sounds I heard through the window I left open in my room was the shouted chorus of the pair, hatches-under and nigh to foundering in their liquor.

Black is the rag of the rover's flag
Flying the bones and skull;
In with the sheet for a seaward beat.
Yo-ho, my merry men, pull.
Heave-ho, my merry men, pull.

But that was not the last incident of the night. Madden Hall was built in two wings connected by the main structure in the shape of a dwarfed U. From my window I could look across the court to the quarters occupied by the family and Sir Richard as sleeping-chambers. Simeon was lodged there also. Frank slept next to me. Before I went to bed, and in sooth I was far from sleepy, I stood by the open casement, looking between the wings to where a glimpse of peaceful English landscape lay beneath the moon and wondering how different would be the wild tropic scenes of Madagascar.

My light was out and the opposite windows were dark until those of the guest-room suddenly flashed bright. I remembered Hudson's instructions to wait upon Levison and report when he had gone to bed and I was surprised to see two shadows silhouetted on the drawn curtains.

They were unmistakably those of Sir Richard and his man-of-business. Before I recollected that this was none of my affair I saw the figures in animated conversation, their gestures suggesting a violent argument. To all intents I was eavesdropping and I stepped back to my bed, took off my clothes and lay awake a long while, envying Don who, with no responsibilities and little imagination, was curled with his nose to his brush, oblivious of pirates or treasure islands.

For myself, I went through a hundred strange adventures in my half-sleep, yet none more hazardous nor exciting than those which were so soon to happen.

CHAPTER VIII

SIMPKINS DISAPPEARS

THE sleep which had mocked me all night deserted me entirely toward dawn. I roused Don and went down through the silent house and out into the gray crisp dawn. To my surprise I found the door at the back of the great hall unbolted. I suspected that Frank, too, had risen betimes and imagined that he had gone to interview his pirates, who, I thought, would not be in mood to welcome him after the sack they had swallowed.

I heard voices as I neared the little stone house where they were bedded and saw that the pin was loose from the bar. At the threshold I distinctly heard the chink of guineas. The hard ground had sounded some warning of my approach, for the door opened and Simeon Levison appeared. If he was taken aback on seeing me, his heavily-molded features betrayed no emotion. Mine, I surmise, were more plastic. To visit these men in secret, to say naught of the chink of coin I had heard, was plainly a breach of hospitality, but I said nothing, resolving later to acquaint Sir Richard.

"Ah, Mr. Penrith," he said in his thick, rich voice that lisped on certain syllables. "You rise early. I am leaving for London within the hour and did not wish to disturb the house. An overnight determination. I was inquiring the way to the nearest post-station from these seamen. They tell me I can get a chaise at the tavern two miles from here."

I knew there was a heavy percentage of lies in this statement, but it was not in my position to demur at his arrangements.

"The place does not hold a savory reputation," I said. "And I doubt the quality of their cattle."

"Starting so early, I shall arrive in London well before nightfall," he answered with a smile. "Rogues usually confine

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their business to the dark hours. Give my respects to Sir Richard. He will understand all my reasons."

Don was sniffing at his calves with a lifted mane and a look at me once in a while that seemed to ask consent to express his opinion of the man in forceful fashion. I shared his instinctive dislike of the sauve Levison, but called him to heel.

"I will tell Sir Richard," I answered.

The house was stirring and Peter came out yawning toward the stables.

"We can furnish you a mount," I suggested.

"I am no horseman," he replied. "I will walk."

He had arrived without valise and he wore his miniver-lined cloak against the morning chill. There was nothing to do but let him go, and I watched him until he disappeared around the house toward the main road.

I could think of but one reason for him rising at such a time and preferring to take indifferent equippage at the tavern. His talk with the two pirates clinched it, together with his inquisitiveness of the previous evening. He had smelled some mystery aboard and, like all his race, had scented gold and ached to follow the trail for some share of it. That he had quarreled with Sir Richard was likely from what I had seen from my window.

It seemed strange that Sir Richard should choose a Jew for his man-of-business. That they were shrewd, went without saying, but most of them were known as money-lenders rather than advisers, though some were reputable bankers.

Sir Richard had mentioned the brewing war with Spain. It might be that money was hard to raise, but then the man had, so far as I knew, come without invitation. Fenton had ridden from London post-haste, but Levison had outstripped him. Simpkins had borne no message save that given him by Pike, unless Sir Richard had added another privately. And I had no right to be quizzical of my employer's concerns.

Don growled and bristled. Fenton had come to the door of the cheese-house, slovenly and unshaven, his eyes bloodshot, his voice like a raven's.

"Sir," he said as he touched his greasy forelock, "for the love of pity send us a rummer of strong waters. That sack must have been brewed in a brass pipkin, for my mouth is lined with tarnish and Pike swears his skull is split in twain."

"What did that man want with ye?" I asked.

"Naught, save to ask Pike the way to tavern. A liberal gentleman, for all he is a Jew. A crown apiece he gave us for the word."

It was gold I had heard clinking, not silver, and Simeon was not the kind to give gold for traveler's information.

"I have not the keys of the cellar," I answered. "Doubtless Peter can draw some ale."

"Anything to swab these scuppers of ours," he said and withdrew into the house, like a bedraggled badger. I gave Peter the order. There was small sense in discussing the matter or antagonizing the rogues. After all, the whole affair might merely be the exercising of Simeon's racial instinct, inspired by chagrin that Sir Richard had not consulted him in this particular affair.

Sir Richard passed the matter off when I later mentioned it.

"The man has an overweening sense of his position," he said. "He has served me and I am somewhat beholden to him in several matters, but he must learn his lesson, and shall be taught it at the first opportunity.

"I have arranged for the necessary moneys," he went on, more cheerily. "We shall start for London the day after tomorrow and so by coach to Plymouth to seek ship. Fenton and Pike go with us."

"Good," said young Madden. "Off at last to move about the world instead of staying like a flyspeck on a map."

"I have yet to convince your mother, young flyaway," said his guardian. "I doubt how she will take the news of your adventuring."

"She will consent," said the lad with easy assurance. "I will wheedle her and you, nunky, must convince her. I warrant you can find the right argument."

There was a hidden strain of meaning to his words that I could not fathom. Sir Richard looked at him with a flash of anger which the boy met level-eyed.

"It is *my* pirate," he said with emphasis. "Therefore *my* map—and *my* money that furnishes the venture. I have stayed coddled long enough," he went on passionately. "Because I have a twisted leg

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and my shoulders are not mates, am I to be hidden in a corner? I am not ashamed to show myself. What my body lacks mayhap my brain may balance. If I choose, out of mine own inheritance, to see the world, who shall prevent it? Mother is no fool, she knows already something is afoot and she knows also that, when I set my mind upon a thing, that thing will I attempt."

The spirit that one could not help but admire flashed in his eyes and his lips were firmly set in that man's face of his.

"You forget," said Sir Richard with some heat, "that I am your legal guardian, responsible for and mentor to your acts until you come of age."

"That is set aside," replied Frank calmly, "by the fact that you are as anxious to undertake this expedition as I am."

Sir Richard laughed. It sounded a trifle forced, as was natural for his being reproved by his junior.

"Nay, we will persuade your mother," he said. "I will see her as soon as she comes down."

YOUNG Madden and I were on the terrace, later that morning, poring over the maps in the portfolio the while he listened to my lecture on projections and compass variations, when we saw brother and sister walking in the rose-garden in earnest conversation.

"Sir Richard is persuading my lady mother," said Frank, his voice holding a satirical flavor that was not uncommon.

I looked up. Mrs. Madden seemed to be greatly agitated. Once she stopped short in the promenade and wrung her hands. Her attitude was one of appeal. Her brother responded with a wide-flung gesture of both arms and a shrug of his shoulders that brought them once more to an argument, moving out of sight behind the close-clipped hedge of a cypress alley. Presently they came up the steps and we rose to meet them.

"Mother is persuaded," said Frank, ironically.

In sooth, the poor lady seemed to have been rather frightened than cajoled, to judge by her face, which twisted pitifully in her attempts to hold it brave.

"I am to go, mother?" asked Frank.

"Yes, my boy, your uncle seems to think it necessary——"

"For your education," broke in Sir Richard. "It is all arranged. We start the day after tomorrow."

"So soon?" faltered Mrs. Madden, her tears starting.

"If we are going to do anything, mother, we must go while the secret holds."

The lad showed little sympathy with his mother's natural grief, but I set that lack down to the general selfishness of youth, excited over its own prospects. I could call up times of my own that now made me ashamed in the remembrance.

Peter, the groom who had served aboard, we took with us, giving him as present duty the guarding of Fenton and Pike. While the payment of two thousand guineas was deferred, Fenton might be trusted not to lose us, but, on the other hand, we meant to give him no opportunity to give us the slip long enough to enter into any other negotiations. For the while, until we were on board, the men were to be watched as zealously as the map and the precious figures of the reckoning themselves. So it was a cavalcade of six that started out the next morning, gaily enough, bound for Madagascar-ho!

The family coach was requisitioned. Sir Richard and Frank rode inside, the two pirates in the rumble seat; Hudson, who was to help take back the cattle to the Hall and act as majordomo until our return, beside the driver, while I rode the mare and Peter his stout cob. The boot and the top of the coach were packed with baggage. Don commenced the journey afoot beside me, taking to the box-seat when he got over-tired and hot.

At the tavern the slattern wife of Simpkins ran out into the road to head us off. Her hair was disheveled, her clothing awry and her eyes wild as I reined in, the coach stopped and Sir Richard put out his head angrily.

"Tut-tut, what's this?" he asked.

"My man!" she said. "Art going to Lunnon?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"This is third morning since he left to drive the fur-coated Jew to Lunnon. Jew was to the Hall, he said. I fear Jim means not to come back. He has taken all the money, not that that means aught, but his best clothes be gone and many things from chest. If so be your worships see him in Lunnon, make him come back. I fear I be deserted wife, Sir Richard."

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The woman seemed utterly beside herself and spoke jerkily. Evidently her fears had whipped her into the belief that Simpkins had left her.

"He's not all bad, my Jim," she went on. "But he listens to evil talk and there be bad men in Lunnon. I fear but he'll join with 'em. And he'll not be back—he'll not be back! And what am I to do with license ending and no money? Horses gone with him and me left with the little fellow, who'll never see his father again."

"Why this is nonsense," said Sir Richard. "He'll be back. London is a big place, and we but pass through in a hurry. If we see him I'll talk with him. Come, come, you must let us on."

The woman was clinging to the coach door. It looked to me as if there were things she guessed or knew that she held back, something that weighted her thought that she was definitely deserted and I thought that Simeon had a hand in it. But Sir Richard was impatient and Peter dismounted and led the woman into the tavern, where we heard a child wailing. The coach drove on and I followed, wondering how much Simpkins knew and how much he had buzzed of it to Simeon. The incident affected me, belike, more than it should, though Sir Richard made light of it when we stopped to bait horses.

"The man has always been a rogue," he said. "He has but cut loose to join his fellows. Before long he'll be hanged. The woman is better off than she sees."

We put up at Sir Richard's town house. Peter looked out for Fenton and Pike, who were ordered to stay indoors while Sir Richard went off to Levison's to arrange his drafts on banks at Plymouth and I bought certain equipment. Frank Madden elected to stay at home, being minded, I surmised, to spend the day talking with the pirates and learn more of the wonders of the land to which we were bound. Our own coach was to return to the Hall and the first thing I did was to book us all on the public stage which left for Plymouth the day following.

The weather was still gloomy, but it failed to affect my spirits, as I selected pistols and muskets and tried sword-blades in the armorers' shops, ordering them delivered at Sir Richard's later in the day. Certain clothes and boots I bought also. Ammunition and provisions were to be secured after we reached Plymouth.

A week before I had slunk along the streets with shoes soggy and full of holes, with raiment worn shiny and stained and not a groat in my pockets. Today the spirit of adventure thrilled in my veins. Tradesmen bestirred themselves and bowed before me, a young lord of stirring affairs, about to embark upon a treasure quest. Naturally I said naught of our business, but some hint of it must have shown in my bearing.

I know that I held my chin high and walked with a springy step, humming a tune, seeing through the fog of London town far-off palm trees and coral sands, a pit that held a chest of gold and jewels. Folks looked at me and gave me the way and some turned to stare after me. Doubtless I swaggered a bit, as who would not in my shoes, at my age, not only all the world before me but already starting on the long trail?

It was my heritage to tread a ship's planks and look forward from her bow for sight of strange lands, to buy weapons that might be handled in skirmish before the prize was won, to face the unknown, a gentleman-adventurer with a share in the undertaking. It was a great day and I made the most of it, dining at Short's and setting back to Sir Richard's in mid-afternoon with everything discharged.

My blood ran too strongly for aught but walking and I left an armorer's and gunsmith's near London Bridge to start westward close to three o'clock. There was yet one errand—mine own. I had pledged some trinkets that I was loathe to lose. One by one they had gone from me, none without thirty hours of hunger prefacing the pawn, in which I had vainly hoped for something to turn up.

There was a jeweled watch of my father's, a signet ring, a locket and some odds and ends, worth far more, aside from their value as heirlooms, than the meager sum I obtained on them. Probably the usurer thought I had stolen them, undoubtedly he never expected to see them redeemed. This was the time to do it. The date of return was uncertain and they might be forfeited. Sir Richard had repaid me the five guineas I had given Simpkins and he had insisted upon providing a sum for my necessary clothing—to be repaid out of the treasure—so that I was passing rich.

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I strode into the dingy alley and found the shop beneath the sign of three tarnished balls, redeemed my effects and came out again in the early dusk that the light fog made as the sun dropped westerly. While on the threshold two figures passed me. I knew both of them.

One was Carter, a notorious crimp. I had many acquaintances of the shady sort in the days of my misfortune, and I was sure of my man. And the other was Simpkins! As I watched them, deep in talk, unmindful of me, they turned into a public-house, a boozing-ken of the waterside where Carter plied his trade of kidnaping seamen and landsmen alike and shipping them, 'twas said, drugged and helpless down a slide to a waiting boat that bore them to the vessel that paid him for his work.

THE place had separate compartments, at one of which glasses only were served to skippers and mates of ships. Carter and Simpkins disappeared into another, where cheaper liquors—or the same stuff at lower prices—were served in pewter. I entered the first and called for ale in a low but not unusual voice. The wench served me and I sat on a settle that ran lengthwise to the partition to sip my brew. I could distinctly hear the voices on the other side and recognize them.

"I want no lubbers," said Simpkins. "Saltwater men they must be."

"Lubbers!" laughed Carter. "What know ye of seamen with your palms grimed with plow-dirt? I tell ye I must have gold-warrant before I stir."

"Ye know who I work for."

"I know who ye *say* ye work for. But if he changed his mind and foreswore ye? I have never heard aught of him as merchanting. It is a merchant craft, ye say?"

"I say nothing. Only I want men who are stout at a pinch, haul-rope or outcutlas."

"So-ho! What kind of cargo carries he? Fighting men? Will pay according?"

"I have told ye the wage. I know naught of his adventure, save what he has said, and that ye know already."

"Forty men who can sail and fight. And in forty-eight hours? 'Tis a large order. There will be earnest wages to advance. Is the ship laden?"

"I tell ye I know naught of all that. The men are to be gathered first. Will ye undertake it or must I go elsewhere?"

"Softly. Ye are not the sort who ordinarily hires seamen. Had ye not come to me from 'Fo'ksle' Blunt I would none of ye. I can get the men. But ye must advance me two guineas a head before I move foot in't. Three more when I have them in hand."

I heard the cautious sound of gold being counted out and an appointment made for the day following at the same hour. Then Simpkins called for a farewell glass—they were drinking spirits—there was the clink of touching glasses and the noise of a shutting door.

I set down my glass and started for the door to follow Simpkins, if 'twas he who had gone out, all my suspicions crystallizing. The tavern-keeper hiring forty seamen who could use cutlas and paying down eighty guineas to a crimp!

The door opened against me and Carter blustered by. I pressed by him, but in the delay Simpkins had been swallowed up in the fog. I looked up and down the street uncertainly, but the man was gone and there was no use to try and trail him. Some one grasped my elbow and peered into my face. It was Carter, returning through the door.

"I thought I knew ye, for all your fine feathers," he said. "Mister Out-at-elbows is Sir Velvet-Cloak! You'll stand a glass on your good luck?"

I went back with him. Simpkins lost, I might get something from the crimp. That Simpkins had in some way got wind of our plans was evident. Either this was a trick of his and Fenton's, or he had opened Pike' message—though that would hardly have given him enough of the secret to go the length of hiring a crew. That bespoke certainty. And my mind swung to Simeon.

I ordered and we sat down affably enough.

"I heard ye were tutor to a young gentleman," said Carter. "Here's a health to your mended fortunes."

"Where got ye your news?" I asked him.

He rubbed the side of his nose.

"I know more than that," he said with a sly look, lowering his voice. "Look ye, Master Scholar, we were always friends. Ye were none of these upstarts who are too proud to associate with those who are short of learning. Ye are of the right sort. Look

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ye, I hear your gentryfolk are rich—and like to be more so?"

He shot me a look.

"I can guess where ye got your information," I said, casting for some way to get all that he knew.

He nodded.

"Belike you heard me talking with the bumpkin," he said. "As I said, we were always friends. Now, if I could give ye news to benefit those ye are in with now, would they pay me for it, think ye?"

I knew him for a double-dealing rogue. It was likely that he would pocket his guineas from Simpkins—or from Simeon—and chink ours against them, playing false to both. But, if there was counter-plot, if Simeon knew of our search and meant to forestall it, or even fight us for it—a dozen changes of possible schemes flitted through my brain—why, forewarned was forearmed.

"It might be," I said. "Perhaps your news is stale already."

"Eh? You are shrewd, ye may have guessed much, but I can give ye details. But we can not talk here. Come to the back room and we'll talk more on't."

He spoke to the bar-wench who lifted a section of the counter and we passed through to a back room furnished with a table and some rough chairs. She followed us and brought a bottle and glasses and then left us. Carter went to the window and peered through its grimy panes at the river. The fog was thickening and he rubbed a spot clear with his sleeve.

"A dirty night," he said. "Tide's on the turn. Dost see that bark moored to the wharf beneath us?"

Like a fool I stepped to the window as he drew back. The next second a blow descended at the back of my skull. My ears roared, light flared before my eyes and, even as my senses left me, I turned and grappled with Carter, twining my limbs about his, fighting blindly. We crashed into the table and then all power left me.

I came to, huddled up in pitchy darkness, my knees close to my chin, my aching head against a slimy slope of board, the smell of foul mud in my nose and somewhere the noise of running water.

I was trussed, wrists and ankles. And I readily guessed where I was. In the crimp chute that led to the river! Presently I should be shot down to a waiting boat and pressed aboard some outward-bound ship—or into the river itself! I could hear it now—the rising tide beneath me.

This was the end of my glorious day. Carter had turned the trick! If Simeon, for I could not get it out of my head that the man-of-business was at the bottom of all this—remembering his curious looks and actions, his riding to town with Simpkins—if Simeon was planning to reach the treasure first, my disappearance would cause delay in our own start and prevent any interference with his own plans. I wondered what they were going to do with me. Crimp me or shoot me bound into the tide?

Carter had made one mistake. He had not hit me hard enough to begin with—and he had bound my hands in front of me instead of behind my back. Beneath me was the trap that would presently open. The chute was narrow and, as I have told, I was huddled up so that my knees were close to my chin. So were my wrists.

I wriggled until I could reach the knots and began to gnaw at them. They were cunningly tied and I felt my lips split and tasted the salt of the blood that came from them and my gums. But presently I got an opening and worked at it with tongue and teeth, listening all the time to the *lap-lap* of the lifting tide which would bring me boat or river. If the first, I resolved to spring overboard and chance a swim, strong as the river swept at flood.

The first knot loosened and I felt for the next loop with my tongue and attacked it. At last my hands were free. I was soaked in sweat and exhausted, so that I was forced to rest despite the sucking wash of the river and the fear that any second might see the trap opened beneath me. In my twisted position it was hard and crampening work with the ankle knots, all apparently part of the same long rope, but I had got one foot clear when a square of light showed suddenly above me at the top of the chute.

I looked up the smooth sides of the pit into the grinning face of Simpkins, his squint sinister in the glare of the lantern he swung in the opening. I had sense enough to clap my wrists together. Ten feet down I caught the reek of the liquor on his breath. Then he spat at me.

"A good voyage to ye," he jeered. "'Twill be a long one—and I'm launching ye with the tide."

The bottom suddenly dropped away and Simpkins disappeared. A gush of cold,

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damp air swept up and I fell into a gulf of darkness and fog. The river reached up to meet me and I sank beneath the swirling water with the laugh from the drunken tavern-keeper ringing in my ears.

CHAPTER IX

CARTER THE CRIMP MISSES AN APPOINTMENT

MY ARMS and legs were numbed from my crouching confinement and mayhap my head—from the blow—was not in prime condition to issue orders, but the shock of the water brought a momentary reaction and I struck out.

I had no sense of direction, what with the fog and the swirling waters, and I blundered against one of the piles that held up the tavern and found a ring—used doubtless for mooring—to which I clung, trying to sense which way lay the river. Even then, unless I could blunder across some rope or timber the chances were desperate. I had often watched the tide rushing among the piers of London Bridge, whirling through the arches and foaming on the great foundation stones.

The odds against a swimmer winning through were perilous, the danger trebled by the fog. But there was little use thinking of such matters. The reaction was fading and the chill of the water biting deep at my vitality. I could not stay there to be drowned like a rat in a bucket. I listened intently and thought I heard a deeper rush of water to my right above the gurgle and splash of the turbulence.

I let go the mooring ring and swam toward the sound of the tide. Five strokes I took and then something tugged at my foot and held me back, jerking me below the surface. I came up in a panic, striking out blindly, and was brought up short once more. I knew what it was now. I had not completely cast off the rope when the trap opened. It was still fastened to one ankle, and the other end of it had caught somewhere under the water.

Under ordinary conditions it would have been a slight trick to rid my foot of its shackle, but now I was weak from the smash at the back of my head and the loss of vitality sapping from me in the cold water that tumbled me in its rush as I worked at the knots, coming up for a breath of air and then, at it again, clinging to the mooring-ring for a brief rest and submerging—it seemed to me a double score of times—before I loosened the cursed thing and slipped it off my foot.

The effort left me too exhausted to do aught but battle feebly against the tide. There was an eddy in this space beneath the tavern, and the current bore me along like a sodden timber, smashing me against the piles, battering me while I clung like a limpet torn from its rock in a sea and trying to reanchor, sinking ineffectual nails into rotting timbers, desperate, little waves slopping into my mouth as it opened for a gulp of air, swept in a circle and, at last, flung out into the river itself, where the fierce tide reached out for me and bore me, resistlessly, toward London Bridge. I could see the dim lights in the houses that lined it as I used the failing remnants of my strength to keep my head above the turbid torrent.

The caprice of the current flung me shoreward along the edge of another eddy that formed a miniature maelstrom beneath a wharf. Too bruised for further fending-off, I awaited the moment when I should be rammed against one of the piles. A lethargy crept over me, a desire to end it all.

There was no lightning review of all my life, such as they say comes to drowning folk, only an acquiescence in a fate that no longer seemed unkind. And then, my knee first and next my crooked arm, as I twined my legs about it, hooked into a taut rope, the cable of a moored vessel, the stern of which I was crossing and all the love of life came back to me again.

I twined myself about the cable and lay on its angle with my head and shoulders above water, the tide tugging to get me back again, waiting for strength enough to climb its pitch to the deck. The rope was taut with the drive of the ship against the river and my weight had no effect upon its tangent. Doubtless other lines held it to the dock, but I thanked Heaven for the forethought of the mariner who had thrown out his stern cable to help him hold steady.

A patch of light marked the windows of the big stern cabin. If, as was usual, a molding, or high bilge-timber ran beneath them, marking the normal waterline, I might gain admittance and save myself the final pull over the poop-taffrail. I summoned my reserves, fearful of staying

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longer in the cold water, and commenced, hand over hand, to drag myself up the four-inch rope. It took the last jot of will and strength. There was no feeling in my curving fingers as I inched up, my water-soaked body dangling above the river.

Little by little I got closer to the windows. Dimly I saw the bilge-streak and, at the crucial second, when my arms seemed torn from their sockets, swung my legs inward and felt the relief as my feet landed on the narrow ledge, still clinging to the cable that stretched above me to its hawse-hole.

There were two men seated at the cabin table and one of them was Carter. The mental processes of the crimp were none too brilliant and, when he had asked me to look at the bark through the tavern casement he had chosen it from its being already foremost in his mind. It was the mooring hawser of this same bark that I had fetched up against, as was natural enough, seeing its position.

Carter was counting out money on the table, doubtless some of the guineas he had received from Simpkins. The double thought struck me that the plot was going forward and that I might yet learn something further of its details, though there would be no welcome entrance for me through those windows.

Heartened by the rest and the excitement, I took up my acrobatic journey, throwing my legs upward to the rope and swarming along it till I reached the hawse-hole. The surmounting of the rail was easier than I had feared. The stern was carved in scrolls and I managed with their aid to stand upon the cable and struggle over the taffrail to the deck. It was deserted. The poop lanterns were lit and I walked unsteadily toward them and looked down into the waist of the vessel.

Merchandise lay about for unlading or for lading, but there was no one visible. Cautiously I crept down the poop ladder. As I reached the middle deck the cabin door back of me opened and I merged myself into the obscurity of some bales. No one came out for the moment. The two stood there talking.

"So," said Carter, "if you can get me these and a dozen from the *Pelican* I can make up my forty. But you must deliver them. If Captain Wayne thought I had aught to do with cajoling away his men for higher wages my business would go a-begging."

"Ah," wheezed the other—from his dress and manner I had set him down as the ship's watchman—"did ye furnish those men for the *Pelican?* That is a rare joke on Wayne, to give him a crew one day and steal them back the next."

"See that ye keep your tongue quiet in this matter," said Carter fiercely.

"Nay, I know when my bread is well buttered. Where do I see ye?"

"At my place. You know where? You are relieved at nine tonight, ye say. Ye can take a jug of grog to the *Pelican's* fo'ksle and make your bargain. Hint to the men just what I've told ye of the trip. 'Twill suit them better than a voyage under Wayne on short wage and shorter rations. This will be a pleasure jaunt. Report to me as soon as you can and I will plan a hideout for them until the *Pelican* ships another crew. She is due to sail day after tomorrow. Make it not later than midnight."

"And ye will pay me then? A crown apiece?"

"The money will be ready. Fail me not."

"Trust me. 'Tis a raw night. Canst find the way?"

Carter affirmed his ability and the watchman retreated to the cabin. I had not found out much, but it was in my mind to prevent Carter from keeping his appointment, if I could. There was a belaying rail close to my head and I reached up and grasped a pin. As Carter walked to the gangway opening I padded after him, wondering what time it was.

Once he stopped, as if suspicious, and I shrank behind a packing-case though, what of fog and night, I was safe enough. The ship's waist was level with the dock. He stepped ashore and I tapped him at the base of the skull so that he pitched forward, practically senseless, trying to raise himself upon the crown of his head like a decapitated chicken under the light of the dock lantern.

It was all done silently. The dock was strewn with the litter of lading. In a trice I had him bound more securely than I had been, with a bight of rope in his jaws to keep him quiet when he regained consciousness. I looked around for some place to stow him. The dock lantern swung on a

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crane by the door of a shed. It was unlocked and the place crammed with old canvas and cordage, buckets of dried paint, broken oars and dock gear. I dragged him to the back of the shed, risking the taking down of the lantern, and ensconced him beneath a pile of moldy topsails.

It was all that I could do and it insured us somewhat of the same delay that my doing away with would have given the other side. When he would be found was doubtful and, savage over my own case, I cared little. I replaced the lantern and picked my way to the stairs that led upward to the street, faint for lack of food, bruised and bedraggled, yet making light of my condition in the thought of having turned the table on our enemies—whoever they might be.

My purse with its few remaining coins was gone, but I had put my regained trinkets in an inner pocket and Carter must have been in too great a hurry for a thorough search for, to my joy, they were intact. But I had a long way ahead of me. No chairman or driver would give me credit in my present state, my finery soaked and slime-smeared, so I set out to walk, thankful, as in the days of my poverty, for the friendly cover of fog and nightfall.

One thing I regretted. I had not been able to discover the identity of the man who was at the back of Simpkins, nor, save for a guess that every instinct assured me was a shrewd one, the nature of the plot.

CHAPTER X

WE CHARTER THE *GOLDEN HOPE*

MIDNIGHT was sounding as I squelched my way up the street to the house. My plunge had stopped my own watch and I had not particularly noticed the chimes as I dogged soddenly along. Late as it was, the lower windows were a blaze of light. By this time they must be alarmed at my absence, and it suddenly struck me that they might have placed a queer construction upon it. Sir Richard knew of my family but not surely of my identity nor at all of my habits, save that I was practically a vagrant when he engaged me.

What Simpkins had apparently done I could also have accomplished. I knew the secret of both chart and reckoning and I might, for all they knew, have disappeared with the intention of hawking that information for a larger share than the five per cent. promised me, or for a sum paid down. In London town I could effectively hide myself for weeks or months, as could Simpkins. It would be useless for them to search for me.

I walked up the steps, leaving a soggy imprint of my trail, and tugged at the bell-pull. Instantly the door opened and Hudson greeted me. From up-stairs there came the short sound of a welcoming bark, and Don literally dived down the staircase and hurled himself at me.

"The dog's been nigh crazy," said Hudson. "Wanted to get out and look for ye, but we were afraid he'd only lose himself. Go right into the library, sir, they'll be glad to see you. Fair worried, they've been."

I calmed Don's flurries of affection and he tagged close to my heels as if determined not to lose sight nor smell of me again and entered the library. A big fire was blazing, with young Madden at one side of it in a deep chair. Sir Richard stood with his back to the flames and, seated at the table, his almond eyes comprehensively taking in every detail of my appearance, was Simeon.

My eyes must have showed something of the sudden rage that flared up in me at the sight of him, for he smiled slightly and, almost instantly, my anger died. I had no real evidence to support any charge against him, no real evidence that Simpkins was allied with him or that the hiring of sailors necessarily meant an excursion in search of the treasure.

Such a man as Simeon, his heavy features a screen for a brain whose brilliance only occasionally flashed through those wonderful eyes, would have a hundred plausible reasons to make a suspicious fool out of me. I disliked the man but, for the first time, I appraised him as a person of high intelligence and indomitable perseverance, the friend of few and a dangerous opponent.

I say that I appraised him, but rather he impressed upon me this same conviction as plainly as if it had been a physical shock that penetrated through flesh to spirit. There was an elemental force to the man that was irresistible, dominant, and it manifested itself in the quality of his smile.

It was a brief exchange between us, but

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in that second he seemed to me to issue a challenge and I to accept it. Then Frank Madden hopped out of his chair with a cordial greeting.

"I told you he would be back, nunky!"

I flushed, and he stopped his speech short. Sir Richard came forward with outstretched hand, ignoring his nephew, though I could read well enough that my ideas about their suspicions of me had been correct.

"Where have you been, lad?" asked Sir Richard, pouring out a glass of sherry for me. "In the river?"

I had gulped down the generous wine and, worn out and empty as I was, I felt the potency of it buzzing in my brain.

"You have come close to it," I answered. "Give me some food and I will tell you all about it. I am nigh to famishing."

"Best take off those clothes. You look like a scarecrow washed down in a flood. We'll wait for ye. Eh, Levison? Or must ye go?"

"My chairmen are at the tavern," said Simeon. "They'll wait. I should like to hear our young friend's adventures."

Clever as he was, he gave me warning and, as I dressed, I concocted a tale of being waylaid that was as far from the truth as chalk from cheese. The presence of Simeon seemed to bear out my general theory. He was trying to get all the particulars that he could and I wondered how much Sir Richard had told him.

I caught one glimpse of myself in the mirror before I went into the warm bath that Hudson had set for me. "A scarecrow washed down by a flood" was an apt description, save that, being flesh and blood, I had suffered severer damage than a stuffed dummy. There were great bruises beginning to show on legs and arms and one shoulder, and the back of my head was stiff and painful. But I thought of Carter underneath the canvas in the dock shed and grinned at my reflection before I bathed and redressed and went down again to fall to on a cold but welcome supper.

Simeon listened to the imaginary account I gave of my adventures with a gravity that was, to my mind, too suggestive of a mask, and piqued me to try and effect its removal.

"By the way," I added, foolishly perhaps, "did you ask Mr. Levison if he has seen aught of Simpkins since the drive from Hendon?"

"Simpkins the tavern-keeper?" asked Simeon. "Naught. Why?"

He shot the query directly at me with a flash of his eyes that surprised me by their sudden rounding and augmented brilliance. Sir Richard unwittingly relieved me by answering.

"The rogue's wife asked us to send him back to her," he said. "He has deserted her, it seems. Penrith, Mr. Levison has shortened our troubles. He has arranged for us a charter of the *Golden Hope* barkentine, consigned to him and now lying at Plymouth."

In the flickering firelight I thought I saw the shadow of a smile on Simeon's lips.

" 'Tis a good augur in the name," I said. "Is she a fast ship, Mr. Levison?"

"None better. Fast and well found. A good captain and a crew that can be depended upon." And he looked at me serenely with those Oriental eyes that seemed to film at will with an inner membrane.

"That will save us a lot of time and trouble," I said and yawned. If the latter could be regarded as a hint, Levison was prompt to take it. I could see no reason for his having stayed so long, save to find out whether I was coming back—unless he had it in his mind to wait up and see the results of Carter's midnight appointment concerning the hiring of men "good at haul-rope or outcutlas." Levison impressed me as the type who knows no difference between night and day when he has business on hand. Hudson was sent for his chairmen and he left us.

"The weapons and outfit you ordered arrived," said Sir Richard. "They are excellent. Did you get our places booked?"

"Yes. Coach leaves the Swan yard at a quarter after six."

"Then we must to bed. Our pirates were snoring two hours since. Come, lad."

"Wait a minute or two," I said.

I told them exactly what had happened. Sir Richard listened attentively, but did not seem to be impressed and young Madden appeared to consider it a source for hidden merriment which danced in his eyes and twitched the corners of his mouth. That nettled me as it should not have done, but I was overtired, and I could see that Sir Richard's attitude was one of somewhat bored politeness.

"I don't know what Simpkins may be up

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to," he said, "but I can not doubt Levison's entire honesty. He has done much to forward our expedition."

"Of which he knows the purpose," I broke in.

"That was necessary in order to raise the ready money. Of course he does not know the reckoning nor has he seen the map."

"Unless he got it from Simpkins."

"How would Simpkins have known it? Do you suppose Fenton told him?"

All this time young Madden sat perched on the arm of his chair, watching the interchange between his uncle and me with evident amusement.

"I don't know who told him," I went on doggedly. "But, suppose I was right, and Simpkins is acting for him. He provides us with a ship and a crew already furnished. Suppose the *Golden Hope* is not so fast as another ship he has in mind? Suppose that the captain of the *Golden Hope* is his man? He pays him, or has done so and will again after this voyage. Also the crew. As for what he has done for you in these matters, I presume he is well paid for it all."

"Trust him for that," chuckled Frank Madden. "A Jew does nothing for nothing and prefers to do something for everything. Simeon is a keen one. I should like to see his face if all this is true and he finds himself outwitted at the end."

"All this argument is based upon suspicion," said Sir Richard. "I have perfect trust in Levison. He is my man-of-business and he does not approve—though he naturally says little as to his opinion—of such a goose-chase as ours."

"Naturally not," I grumbled. "If he is bent upon it himself."

"We'll to bed," said Sir Richard coldly. "If you feel that this expedition is being badly planned, Mr. Penrith, you are at liberty to withdraw from it."

That brought me up all standing. For the moment I had forgotten that I was a dependent, a tutor on fifty pounds a year.

"As you please," I answered with a bow.

"No, no," cried young Madden. "I will not have you quarrel. Justin goes or I stay home. I think he is right about your subtle Simeon. Let him follow us or lead, we'll find a way to clip his ambitions. But Justin goes with us."

He spoke with angry authority and once more I saw Sir Richard bow to it.

"I was hasty," said the latter. "There may be something in what you say, but I can not offend Levison without cause. Let us to bed and sleep on't."

The lad came into my room as I was getting into bed.

"Justin," he said, "my uncle is a self-satisfied prig. Simeon is a fox. But he may find his earth stopped. Meantime I vow to you that you shall not be the loser in this expedition—however it turns out. Good night."

He left me with a tantalizing smile that hinted at things withheld in his wise young head that held so many quirks for all its activity. I had little time to ponder on it, for I was asleep before my head touched pillow.

CHAPTER XI

BLACK MICHAEL

THE long ride to Plymouth heartened all of us, I think, with its early start in the crisp morning, the changing countryside, the greetings from the villagers, the dinners at the little post-inns or more pretentious hostelries and over all glorious October weather. We had the coach practically to ourselves and Fenton and Pike roared out their chanteys, managing always to keep what they termed "half-seas-over" holding us always in the spirit of the journey. Don ran with the coach at times, barking in friendly fashion at the horses, clambering aboard when tired to curl up at my feet.

Between whiles they spun yarns. Vastly entertaining they were, even when discounted of sailor's superstitions and brag. As for young Madden, his brain was completely fascinated by the tales they told of pirate life, wherein the buccaneer was a gallant gentleman who only robbed the rich and relieved the poor, was brave in fight, gallant to women, and generally a swaggering gold-lace, cock-your-hat hero.

To believe all their prating, either man must have been upward of a century, for they never could tell of an engagement unless it was in the first person—a habit not confined to pirates. Pike claimed to have been with Hal Morgan and Mansfield in the Bahamas and at Jamaica, to have seen the fall of Porto Bello and the sack of Panama—nearly fifty years before. Fenton boasted of sharing in the ravaging of Peru under

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Sawkins, Sharp and Watling, and of crossing the Isthmus of Panama with Townley.

But, of all the leaders, both sang loudest the praises of Edward Davis, successor to the John Cook who first led the buccaneers to the South Seas. I fancy that both had a mind to claim the score, but Fenton first thought of doing so, when he described the famous battle of Davis at sea with two great Spanish vessels which he fought for seven days with inferior metal, half the number of cannon of all sorts and but a quarter of the men, crippling one and capturing the other, to the lasting glory of the English flag under which he battled.

Spirit-stirring stuff it was, gleaned from fo'ksle and cabin, oft-repeated and oft-changed, and it made the red blood run fast in the veins of any man, though I knew that the daring of the earlier buccaneers who united nationalities against Spain and the Inquisition had long since degenerated to cruelty and their independence and rude honor into vice and brutality.

But the lad saw none of this. He sucked in the tales as desert sand sucks water and I have no doubt visioned himself many times upon a quarter-deck beneath the black flag that was his chosen ensign—until some lurch of the coach brought him cruel consciousness of his physical limitations.

So Plymouth came at last, with a warm welcome from Sir Richard's friends and from some of mine, who judged my present success by the quality of cloth I wore. Through it all we hurried to our start, pushing an early sailing with promises of extra pay to stevedores and sailors.

The *Golden Hope* was a good ship, neither old nor new, neither fast nor sluggish, well-timbered, well-masted and well-found. She was a barkentine—low-waisted, high-pooped, a trifle too bluff in the bows for speed or close sailing to the wind, but a good vessel enough, pierced with cannon ports for eighteen guns, of two-hundred tons burthen.

We arranged for two long-muzzled barkers, to be mounted on swivels, one at the bow, the other at the stern, and such an armament of pikes and axes, muskets, cutlases and small arms, grenadoes, powder and bullets as speedily rendered her an object of curiosity.

We gave out that the *Golden Hope* was to sail in ballast for a return cargo of silks and spices, being armed against pirates known to linger in the Mozambique Channel and the eastern coast of Africa, likely indeed to be picked up at any point of the voyage for goldfish in the shape of under-armed merchantmen. Both Fenton and Pike had sworn to keep secret the nature of the voyage and, so far, they had kept their word—for their own sakes if not for ours.

By virtue of my knowledge of sea-craft, slight enough at that time, Sir Richard left much of that work in my hands and I acted as supercargo to the apparent malcontent of the captain of the *Golden Hope*, who audibly muttered things about the interference of landlubbers. For which I saved a later reckoning. The crew seemed effective enough though I doubted their spirit if it came to fighting. Some demurred about shipping until promised extra wages and some insisted upon being paid off. But, on the whole, they were a fully satisfactory lot if properly commanded.

There the hitch came. Captain Jacobs —there was the touch I had expected— was a swarthy man with meeting eyebrows that proclaimed the seal set upon the brows of the Children of Israel. He was suave rather than courteous and superficially obliging rather than efficient. Trying to set aside any personal prejudice, I looked for trouble born of his indifference and, the third day after our arrival, trouble came.

With an affectation of sorrow Captain Jacobs announced that half the crew had failed to report—they had night shore-leave after their recent voyage—nor could he find them in any of the grog-shops or water-front resorts. Now, the missing men were the pick of the crew, including the petty officers, the quartermaster, gunner, boatswains and all those who headed watches or led in handling the sails and took the wheel-tricks.

Sir Richard was in the town when Jacobs, with a suggestion of a sneer, made his announcement to me. I said nothing but started back across the Hoe to see if I could find trace of them and the more I pondered over it the more it seemed to me as if there was preconcerted action. Some of the men had extra wages coming to them and it was not like seamen to forego their pay.

If Carter had given up his contract with Simpkins, as might be likely after our little

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encounter, what more likely than a messenger from London from Simeon to his own captain, commandeering the pick of a crew already in his pay, an order which would at one stroke set us back and him forward? Jacobs had appeared indifferently surprised and disappointed at the calamity. Moreover, he professed inability to fill the gaps.

I scoured the longshore haunts and found out an important thing. A coasting hoy had left for Southampton on the flood at midnight, sailing sooner than expected and with her cargo of lime only half aboard. She was one of several vessels chartered by the firm of Harris & Harris. Harris is a fairly common name in London, and the members of the family—or tribe—are English Jews, several generations old in the country. It looked conclusive to me and I so reported to Sir Richard though I expected him to scoff at my reasoning.

To my surprise he had changed his attitude.

"Look ye, Penrith," he said. "I may have seemed deaf to what you felt were good arguments but they have not gone unheeded. So far I have acted from policy. Simeon Levison has handled my affairs and through him I secured the ready money for this expedition, keeping, as I thought, its purpose from him, inquisitive as he was. It is within plausibility that he has found out what we are after and I would not trust him beyond close bounds. But, if we were to sail, we needed the money. You say the ship is a good craft and I have cashed the drafts.

"Levison can go hang as far as I am concerned, though we must go carefully even yet and we have no direct evidence against him. Jacobs is a capable navigator, as his record shows. He is under our orders and it will go hard if we can not handle him. The delay is bad but we must overcome it and at all hazards reach the island first. I have questioned Fenton and am sure that he gave no information to Simpkins. Pike's letter carried nothing definite. We have the reckoning and the chart and, at the worst, the others can have no more absolute knowledge than a general idea of the position of the island.

"We must remember that the Government knew of the existence of Towne's treasure. Simeon—if it is he—may have got what information they obtained. He has many strings to his bow back there in London. Pike was friendly with Simpkins and it is like he may have said more in his cups than he remembers though he swears he said nothing. But Fenton held the data and Fenton had small use for Simpkins."

"I would give scant respect to the oaths of either of the rogues," I said. "The one thing to do is to get started. The stevedores are at work. I must recruit another score of men somewhere. There are plenty of seamen of sorts in Plymouth who would be tempted by the pay but somewhere we must get a first-class quartermaster who will act as second in command. You say we can not get rid of Jacobs?

"Not without losing charter to the ship and there is no other available vessel to be had, to say nothing of time lost in changing stores again. I will see what I can do among my merchant friends toward recruiting if you will scout the water-front. Delay may cost us dear."

I read anxiety on his face and his whole manner showed more of direct purpose than he had hitherto displayed. With the gaining of his necessary cash he seemed to have gained freedom from Simeon—for that there had been something covert between them I was still sure.

All day I tried to pick up sailors but found none that seemed capable to assume any authority and, more than ever, a ship's crew on such an affair as ours needed discipline at the head of every subdivision of men. Every hour of delay gained in importance. I could imagine Simeon lading a faster ship and achieving that slow smile of his and I wondered—and hoped—that he himself would undertake the trip.

If so, and we met, I had an account of my own to settle. I had evened matters with Carter but it was Simpkins who had spat at me as he pulled the trap at the end of the chute, and back of the tavern-keeper—I was as sure of it as I was of my own existence—was Simeon.

Night came and we still had but twenty-six men where we needed forty. Both Fenton and Pike had proffered their services as recruiters but I had no fancy for shipping men of their selection. Fenton had been paid his two thousand guineas and still remained with us, Peter sticking to him and Pike like a burr. Either Fenton's talk of the woman and the farm were entirely mythical or his plans had miscarried, or,

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what was more likely, he figured that his share of the treasure was too big to forego.

By his acceptance of the cash his share had reverted to its original one and a half. Pike was to have his doubled, five per cent. between the two of them, an equal amount with my own dividend and the rest to Frank Madden and Sir Richard.

CLOSE on midnight I made another round of the shore taverns, fullest at that time and the sailors like to be most complacent about signing on. I turned up no likely men until I came to the last and most popular of those resorts—the Fouled Anchor. Lights blazed from the windows and a shouted chorus rolled out and echoed back from the opposite buildings of the narrow street. I recognized the voice of Chantey-Sam Pike.

Fifteen fathoms 'neath the wave,
Cradled in an ocean grave,
Where the tide slips overhead
And the bones of seamen dead
Dance in solemn, jigging time,
To the shifting of the slime.

There he lies, blast his eyes,
Long-Tom Hayes the Buccaneer!

Once a little lad was he,
Lisping prayers at mother's knee.
But his soul was not alone
When he stood before the throne.
For a score that he had sped
Waited till Long-Tom was dead.

At their tale his soul did quail,
Long-Tom Hayes the Buccaneer.

And Long-Tom, on earth so brave,
Plead his sinful soul to save:
All the deeds that he had done,
Rose before him one by one.
Demons shrieked his passing knell
As they bore his soul to hell.

There he lies, there he fries,
Long-Tom Hayes the Buccaneer.

Marveling a little why pirates inevitably loved ballads that foreshadowed their own fate—save that they reveled in vaunting their own fearfulness and crimes—I slipped in as the crowd howled the chorus and hammered on the tables with their rummers and mugs in applause.

The place was filmed with smoke. Around the walls were settles placed at right angles to make cozy seats, a table in each of them. The sanded floor was cleared in the middle and at one end two fiddlers sat upon a platform. There must have been nearly half a hundred crowded in the close quarters. Perhaps a fifth of these were wenches and, as I glanced around, the fiddlers struck up a lively tune and ten sailors, clumsy as bears in the dance, hugged their partners while the servers hurried to take orders from the rest.

I saw Chantey-Sam with Flipper Fenton—the faithful Peter in attendance—seated in one of the nooks with three of the sailors from the *Golden Hope.* Peter, a clever fellow, had achieved the liking of the two rogues, which was according to my suggestion and the six were as thick as thieves over booty-division.

"Aye, that's the life," cried Fenton. "A free life and no man for a master. Guineas to throw to the girls and a fight to keep a man's muscles limber. When I sailed with Davis——"

"Who sailed with Davis?" interrupted a deep voice. A giant of a man rose from his seat at the next settle and advanced to the head of Fenton's table. His beard flourished to his cheek-bones, black and curly, his bristling eyebrows thatched black eyes and his thick hair, tied behind in a club queue, pushed down beneath a crimson headkerchief and hid his brow. What was to be seen of his flesh was deep bronze, a lighter seam across one cheek showing the weal of an old slash.

"Show me a Davis man. Who was it, Mate? You?"

Fenton met his eyes uneasily, but doubtless he had been bragging and, to save his face, he had to meet the issue.

"Aye, I did."

"Wast with him when he fought the Spaniards, seven days and nights, the guns firing and the decks running blood to knee-high in the scuppers? Wast there, Matey?"

Fenton took heart of grace as the rest looked at him with new admiration.

"Aye, that was I. Twenty times the Dons boarded us and we drove 'em back like sheep."

"You lie," thundered the man. "You lie in your rum-swizzling throat!"

"Who says I lie?"

Fenton started to his feet, his hand slipping to his knife. Chantey-Sam clutched at his cutlas hilt. Peter caught my eye and kept quiet.

"I do, and ten men to back me! Why,

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you ship-scuttling, women-bullying dog; you shilling-cadger, you back-striking dog; Davis would not have used the likes of you to handle a slush-brush! I was his gunner, so was Amber here, and Wells his bo'sun. Here be eleven of us who fought aboard the *Terror*. Off deck and out with ye, a boaster who would cadge a free tankard on the strength of others' deeds."

He picked up the glass of hot rum-and-water that stood in front of Fenton and flung it in his face. The knife flashed but the giant's hand closed like a vise about Fenton's wrist, crushing it so hard that the man shrieked with the pain and the weapon fell to the floor.

The newcomer's companions crowded about him, the fiddlers broke off in discords, the girls screamed and the place was in an uproar. Blades flashed and the landlord strove to break through the mob. The men who had fought with Davis stood in solid phalanx with knives, pistols and cutlases ready, and Fenton and Pike, with those who stood by them, retreated.

"Masters all," cried the landlord. "The officers will be upon us. I shall lose my license! Peace, I pray you!"

"Then let yon lying braggart clear or I'll slit his weasand so that it holds neither lies nor liquor. Out!"

Fenton, holding his wrist, glared at his opponent. The odds were against him. He turned to Pike.

"Come Sam, let's out of this. 'Tis easy to play bully with the crowd to back ye!"

With the seamen who had come with them they retreated to the door, urged by the landlord, pleading with them.

"No brawling, I beg. No brawling! We shall all land in jail! The law is strict!"

At a nod from me Peter went with them. Neither Fenton nor Pike had noted me. The row subsided, the servers picked up the overset tables and the broken glasses and Davis' men reseated themselves. Within the minute the fiddlers took up their rune, the clumsy sailors and their hoyden partners commenced once more to gyrate and a look of relief spread over the face of the landlord.

"Who's to pay for damage?" he demanded.

The giant slipped his hand into the pocket of his laced-coat, tarnished and sea-stained but once a fine garment, and brought out a handful of guineas. Half a dozen of them he slipped into the landlord's eager fist.

"There's palm grease for thee," he said. "Serve all hands for a health to Davis. Plenty more where that comes from. There's still shot in our lockers."

I had looked eagerly at these hard-bitten mariners. True they were confessed buccaneers but they would be a mighty aid to a ship's company. We were—what with Simeon and the waiting treasure—between the devil and the deep sea. If we could only trust these hairy, deep-sea sailors?

The glasses were filled and quaffed, the giant standing, shouting in a gale-topping voice:

"To Davis! Bottoms up and no heel-taps!"

NOW Devon has ever been the brewing-place of sea-rovers. Not a man there but knew of Davis and of all the long list of buccaneers that harried the Dons and ravished their West Indian possessions to the ultimate glory and profit of the English flag. Bloody deeds they had done, these sea gladiators, but all the world thrills to a fighting man and Davis was acclaimed a brave and gallant gentleman.

If any doubted—which I for my part, did not—that these men had been of his crew, all dissent had left with Pike and Fenton. The giant did not swagger. He looked upon them with a humorous disdain as a set of shore-drifters and landsmen as he set down his glass.

"Let me play host to Davis' men," I said, seizing my opportunity. "First the captain, then his gallant crew."

He looked at me doubtfully, then a friendly gleam came into his dark eyes.

"Why not?" he said. "Why not, my gallant gentleman, though I'll swear you are a strange fish to swim in these waters."

"I swim in good company," I answered, and he took the comeback with a laugh.

I sat down with them at the two tables set end-to-end that had been provided them. They were a rough crowd with small respect for laws of church or state but they were the sort that had trailed with Drake and Raleigh, the kind that had shipped with my own forebears and fought under them. Such men had followed my own kin, I should be able to handle them, I thought, and braced myself to the occasion, for these were the kind of seamen to

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have upon a voyage like ours—gunpowdery squibs though they were—if, and this was the rub, if one could handle them.

For there is honesty among rogues where they respect the master. Piracy was their trade and loot their aim, yet, with Davis and others, such men took their minor shares and were content. And we were desperately in need of their strength and experience. We were on a desperate hazard and, if Sir Richard and I could not hold the upper hand we had no right upon such an adventure.

"Where came ye from?" I asked.

"From Bideford last, where we landed. But first from Providence Island in the Bahamas. Honest men we be with the vice-admiral's pardon in our pockets. Free men to walk the land without fear of gallows. Hark ye, the game is over in the Caribbean! Davis has accepted commission with the king and we look to serve an the war break with Spain. Art in the service, sir?"

"Not I, but I might have service for ye," I replied. "Spain still talks treaties. The war may never break. Wilt ship for a six-months' cruise on good pay?"

"No merchant's service for mine," he answered. "I am no skipper's cur to cringe at sight of a rope's end and live off weevils and salt horse. My stomach is too proud. Eh lads?"

"This will be different," I urged. "In food and pay and treatment. 'Tis a private venture."

His eyes narrowed.

"Oh-ho! A private venture! Art not afraid to ship such wolves as we be?"

"If I feared ye, I would not have asked."

"Oh-ho! A game-cock."

His glance ran over me from head to toe and back to my eyes where the challenge held between us.

"Nay, ye'd not be feared," he said. "I'd take orders from ye. But 'tis no time to talk. We are but just ashore and have guineas to trade for pleasure. Time enough to talk when money's all gone and credit's scarce. A week hence we may speak of it."

He was evidently the leader and the rest accepted his decision.

"Come," I said. "The ship sails three days from now, as soon as she is laden. Wilt give me your word now and have your spree ashore? The wage is good and the galley well-found."

"What ship?"

"The *Golden Hope* barkentine."

"I saw her. A likely vessel enough. What say, lads? If there's no news of war and if there be likelihood of using those arms they say have gone aboard your craft? We all go together, mind, and take our posts. Gunner am I, and so is Amber, and Wells is bo'sun. I've a mind to take ye up. This land smell is stale to me already. Goode is my name—and good my nature, when I'm treated fair. Michael Goode. Black Michael, gunner of the *Terror*."

"Quartermaster Goode of the *Golden Hope*, if you sign on."

"Why that is fair spoken. And, look ye, buccaneer I may have been, pirates they call us, but we are pardoned men. Piracy is played out. There are naught left but a parcel of beggarly throat-cutting *gastodos* and marooners who run when t'other shows weapon, like the boasting cur I drowned in his own grog. We are honest men now and we play fair with those that trust us. Enough of talk, my throat is dry as a Bahama sand-spit. Three days from now we'll speak further."

I took the hint and supplied liquor enough to remove all dryness from their gullets. As soon as I could do so, on plea of business, I left.

Black Michael had grown mellow and turned songbird when I slipped away.

Full sixty cannon had the Dons
And we had only twenty,
But they were served by Englishmen
And so they found them plenty.

For seven days and seven nights
We fought 'em rail to rail, sirs.
We gave the Span-i-ard his rights
And bullets flew like hail, sirs.

I was not so sure of the wisdom of my move by the time I reached home. For all their claim of being turned honest, a sight of the treasure would arouse all their instincts and I was not sure what sort of animal trainers Sir Richard and I might turn out to handle these wolves. But without them there seemed no chance of sailing, so in that way they were a godsend. There would be trouble with Fenton and Pike but we could not consider their feelings in the matter. If needs be we could shift them or ship them back from the first port we touched at.

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The present necessity was to keep them as hostages. I felt far more sure of Black Michael and his comrades than of fellows of Fenton's kidney. He was only a pinch-beck pirate compared to the gunner of the *Terror*. I wondered whether Sir Richard would be of my opinion. Unless he had substitutes there could be little argument. It made the trip a greater adventure but one could not expect to gather treasure-trove as easily as picking cherries.

Peter met me with a glum face.

"Fenton's gone," he said.

"Gone. How? Where?"

"I know not. We parted with the three men from the ship and, on the way up Fenton claimed to have dropped his knife. He went back to look for it and that was the end of him. We called and searched but, if he heard or saw us, he gave no sign. 'Twas not my fault, sir."

"What of Pike?"

"He stayed with me. Helped to find Fenton. He swears Fenton has played him a shabby trick but he did not try to join him."

"Send him to me. Is Sir Richard abed?"

"Yes sir, two hours ago, they tell me."

Pike came, sullen and sleepy, cursing at his mate's desertion. I thought he overdid it and he seemed to guess my opinion.

"That black-avised bully shamed him afore the seamen, Mr. Penrith. That's the trouble. Fenton is a proud man. But I've proved faith. I'm staying free-willed and hearty, ain't I? Fenton was 'shamed to see ye after that black dog made him back water. Peter told us ye were in tavern."

"Fenton loses his share of the treasure," I said. "Did he have his gold with him?"

"In his belt, under his cutlery. Day and night. Not even me would he trust with a sight of it, nor the loan of a single piece."

"See if you can find him, you and Peter," I said. "He's a fool to lose his share."

"Aye, that he is. I'll do my best."

I dismissed him. I could have sworn that he hid a grin as he turned his back on me at the door and I resolved to see that he had no chance of joining Fenton, if such was his intent. Here was a fresh coil. I could not believe that Thumbless Tom would give up his share because he had been outbullied nor did he have idea that Black Michael might sail with us. True, he had at first refused to come at all but that was when he hoped for five thousand guineas in hand instead of two.

There would hardly be time for him to get to London to join with Simeon if that was his game. If he hoped to resell the secret of the map and ring in Plymouth, or elsewhere, we still had a good start. Three days should see us ready to clear. But, Fenton gone and the extra risk attached, made it imperative that we should secure Black Michael and his mates. Fenton was up to some deviltry I was positive. He had been waiting his first chance to give Peter the slip or perhaps had lingered while his plans matured. And I was pretty sure that Sam had some inkling of it and that Fenton had not double-crossed his comrade.

But all my puzzling and conjectures were ill-feathered arrows for that target, as the outcome showed.

CHAPTER XIII

TREACHERY?

WE WERE off. We had left the Cat-water and sailed down the Sound on the flood an hour after dawn, a full breeze bellying the sails and humming in the cordage the siren spell of the Unknown. Black Michael was at the wheel, efficient, every inch the seaman, with the salt wind blowing away the fumes of his spree ashore. His ten bullies of Davis were along, a fine yeast of manhood to quicken the rest of the crew, a reckless set but eminently capable, magnificent machines with mentalities scarcely greater than children, for all their rough and tough manners.

They lacked imagination, save as it was conjured up by others or by strange happenings. They lacked reasoning force, they were creatures of instinct and impulse and superstition and therein lay their weakness and our strength. If our brains were of the right sort, our wills capable of stamping our determinations, we should have little to fear from them. The game was in our own hands, it seemed to me. They were our cards and, if we could not play them aright, we should lose the stakes.

As the voyage passed they would take our measures according to their standards and judge us accordingly. Already they had shown what they thought of Captain Jacobs, not by any disobedience to his

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orders, but by the way they carried them out, a good-humored tolerance.

During the lading and outfitting, Frank Madden had practically lived aboard. He had developed surprising agility about the decks, discarding his crutch and using only his stick and handy grips on the rigging which he soon knew automatically. He was already a prime favorite with the crew, partly on account of an excess of liberality in treating them to grog-pence.

Now, as we stood on the poop together his eyes glowed with excitement. The wind and the salty tang of it had whipped color into his cheeks.

"I believe I could handle a crew of men like this, Justin," he said. "As soon as I mastered navigation, of course. They are a dull lot of children and bow down to brains."

"Plus authority," I suggested.

"Aye," he answered. "And that I could supply. A sure hand and a quick eye with a pistol would hold them. Didst ever hear of Swan?"

"Who was he?"

"A negro dwarf, part Spaniard. They called him the 'Black Swan,' Pike says. And for all his lack of size and strength and despite his color, he made his name a terror in the Caribbean. He had an island off the Bahama Bank with a fort on it and a big house of logs where he kept his *seraglio* and he and his men lived like the Grand Mogul."

I looked at him curiously. There were many lads who had been led to envying highwaymen by the recounting of the glories of their exploits, some of them in such ballads as I myself had penned concerning Towne—the penalties being omitted or dignified as brave endings to a merry life—and I wondered if some such quirk was latent in Frank's brain. His resentment to his crippled condition was like to breed some such fanciful reaction.

"I wouldn't credit all the tales that Chantey-Sam tells, if I were you," I said, for, to my mind, the lad had been allowed too much intimacy with both Pike and Fenton.

He looked up at me with his quick, bright look that always seemed to hold a lurking smile, a suggestion that you were never taken entirely into that whimsical confidence; and walked over to the binnacle, back of which Michael's brawny fingers spun the spokes while his black eyes glanced at the trim of the sails and checked the flighty impulses of the ship to caper to the shift of the cross-seas.

Nothing more had been seen or heard of Fenton. He seemed to matter little now that we had fairly started and the race—if there were other entries—was on. Pike, often boasting of his loyalty, was aboard. There had been no open quarrel between him and Black Michael and the latter did not refer to the affair at the Fouled Anchor.

On the urging of Sir Richard, and not greatly to the liking of Captain Jacobs, I acted as first mate. This I undertook the more readily, against my lack of deep-sea experience, because it gave me opportunity to check the navigation. Black Michael, as quartermaster, I counted on to offset my present ignorance.

We had laid out our course. It lay almost due south and a little west from Plymouth, straight to Madeira, where we would call for water, then again in the same line for the Cape Verde Isles, passing the Azores, and so for the Cape of Good Hope and, rounding it from Cape Town, to Madagascar and the Mozambique Channel.

The breeze was a brave one from the northwest, driving us on the starboard quarter at a slashing gait, the *Golden Hope* making better speed than I had hoped for despite her bluff which churned the blue sea into creamy foam that bubbled alongside and went dancing off into a bubbling, iridescent wake. I caught the suggestion of a frown in the looks Michael gave to the sails, though all were drawing full, and stepping beside him, as if to watch the compass, I quietly asked him—it being Captain Jacobs' deck—if aught was wrong.

He glanced at where the captain stood by the rail looking aft to the fast disappearing hills of England and shifted the quid that he had stowed in the pouch of his hairy cheek as some solace for the liquors of yesterday.

"If sheets were in she'd travel faster," he muttered just above his breath.

I had fancied the same myself and I crossed to Captain Jacobs and casually made the suggestion.

"The wind seems to be hauling a bit," I said. "Why not flatten in?"

He looked at me courteously enough. Since we had started, and after the decision

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appointing me mate, he had made a point of a suavity that was only a little short of condescension.

"With her lines she makes too much leeway if you press her too hard," he answered. "She is a cross witch at falling off."

The answer was plausible enough. He knew the ship better than I did, and he was a master-mariner. Yet I would rather have trusted to Michael's opinion whose hands in such a matter were as good if not better than another's brains. To Michael, master-helmsman, the wheel was as the pulse of the ship, he could tell by the sheer feel of her wheel the tricks she might play and check her lunges before they started. Correspondingly he could gage by the look of her wake, by the resistance of her bows, by the leverage of the water against her rudder, when she was at her best. But, without directly challenging Jacobs' authority on a minor question, I could not well continue the discussion.

THERE were just forty-one of us aboard. Michael and his fellows were all English, seven of them Devon men. Eighteen men were British born and the rest were a mixed lot, picked up here and there on the high seas by Jacobs—three of them Lascars. Between Michael's men, who held the high places of minor authority, and the others, there was already a factional spirit manifest. The Davis seamen appeared to hold the rest in mild contempt.

Such a division might or might not work to our good if the trouble which I fancied hovered in the distance ever materialized. The main thing was to win the respect, and from that the obedience, of Black Michael and his bullies. And those eleven men were worth the balance of the muster.

We assigned all to duties and stations outside of the ship's routine, proposing to institute somewhat of a military discipline and hold drills for boat duty and for possible offense and defense. The danger from privateers was no idle one. Such measures would keep minds and time occupied and, as conjectures concerning the real nature of our trip must naturally furnish the pith of forecastle gossip, we trusted to have our men well under control by the time the secret must inevitably be broached.

Pike was, of course, an always possible leak of premature information but he was in the unenviable position of being neither one of the original crew of the *Golden Hope* nor of Michael's following, though he strove hard to render himself generally popular, with his constant stream of chanteys and deep-sea ballads.

The headland of the Lizard faded into the blue and hour after hour we swashed steadily through the crisp seas, southward bound. At sunset the wind lightened but with topsails and royals we kept good pace.

At dinner, in the after cabin with Sir Richard and young Madden, we heard the clutter of feet and the protest of shifting yards and booms. The barkentine heeled on the opposite tack. Presently Jacobs came down.

"Wind has shifted," he said. "On the port quarter now. And it's getting misty. No need to shorten sail, Mr. Penrith."

It was my duty to relieve him, and I went on deck. As he had said, there was a smeary haze over sea and sky, enough to veil the stars. A seaman named Roderiguez was at the wheel, one of Jacobs' original crew. The course was southwest-by-south and I did not change it. I noticed that the general direction of the sea had changed, the waves were quartering and I commented on it as the man constantly shifted his spokes to humor them.

"Cross-channel currents," he answered surlily.

I made no reply but went forward, across the lower deck and up into the bows to see how close the mist shut down upon us. It showed signs of lessening and evidently lay low on the water. A group of seamen lounged 'round Chantey-Sam, smoking and chewing, clad in peajackets—for the night air was crisp. I listened for a minute to his singing.

I've roamed the seas from Malabar
To Spanish Main and Panama
  And far-off Madagascar.
My mates have been a rummy crew,
I've sailed with Greek and sailed with Jew
  With Indian and Lascar.
But all the band in this joined hand,
As soon as we set foot on land
  Swift as those feet could travel;
We sought the things for which we yearned
And spent the gold so hardly earned
  A-raising of the devil-ha!
  A-raising of the devil!

"Now then, my hearties, join in."

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The guinea's chink, the goblet's clink,
The laughs and sighs of lasses;
These be the things that pleasure brings
While merrily time passes.

I stood in the covert of the sails so as not to disturb them, and presently made my way aft again. The wind, what there was of it, and it was beginning to gain in power with the passing of the fog, was on the port quarter and the curving bulk of the mainsail, aslant to starboard, soared up to where the topsail seemed to carry it to a vanished point. Above this the stars were commencing to blink, the mist was streaming away in smoke before the breeze.

A constellation held my gaze oddly. Vaguely—I was half musing—it seemed out of place. I shifted my look seaward. Just above the wall of the fog the Great Bear showed plainly and, beyond the pointers, the Pole Star—abeam and to port! We were sailing due east!

I jumped up the ladder and made for the binnacle, wondering if my eyes had failed me. The course showed as before—southwest-by-south—the helmsman holding her close to it. But, by the stars, we were traveling up-channel, parallel with the coast, more than a hundred degrees off our true course, traveling unnecessary leagues at a tangent and wasting precious hours.

I had a compass of my own below and I secured it without a word to any in the cabin. I set it on the binnacle box as nearly as I could to the true longitudinal line of the deck and the needle swung to the North Star and gave our course as approximately five points south of true east.

Either the ship's compass had become variant or some one had tampered with it.

I seized a speaking-trumpet and roared my orders. The bo'sun's shrill whistle brought the men jumping to sheets and braces. The astonished helmsman spun the spokes and we came over to the true course, the wind on the starboard quarter once again and the *Golden Hope* heading southwest-by-south.

Sir Richard came on deck, followed by Madden and then by Jacobs, half-dressed, from his berth.

"What is it?" he asked. "Are we afoul of some one."

"We are," I answered, "afoul of some one without doubt. Bring a lantern."

With my knife I unscrewed the metal covering to the stand and carefully lifted it. Something tinkled to the deck—the broken-off point of a case-knife, inserted between wooden neck and metal rim, steel enough to divert the needle and the course.

If it was accident, it was providential that it had been snapped off at the exact spot that sent us straight down channel in clear waters. Had the fog held, morning might have found us somewhere off Calais, for we had northing enough to clear the Channel Islands and were still to the west of them. But, for all Captain Jacobs' astonishment, I did not think it accident. If Simeon's treasure-hunting craft was ahead of us, or even behind, these lost leagues might mean the race won for him and lost for us. And I would have liked to look at Captain Jacobs' own knife for a second.

CHAPTER XIII

FAIR WEATHER AND FOUL PLAY

IT TOOK us ten days to fetch Funchal in Madeira, though the group is but little more than twelve hundred miles from Plymouth. The wind, while it never failed us utterly, was fitful and apt to be light. The northwest breeze soon blew out and it held fairly steady from the south-southwest while we headed southeast by south. The *Golden Hope* had her faults though in the main she was a weatherly craft. Her entrance was none too sweet and on the wind she was apt to butt and dive too deeply but her run was clean.

Hang close to the wind, she could not. Michael could edge her up better than any of the rest who were apt to keep her over full.

We swung along on a bowline, her teak decks aslope, the wind harping in her straining weather stays and shrouds, the coiled gears swinging on the pins as she lifted and pitched, the breeze drumming in the tense sails; at times, when the wind freshened and the barkentine lay fairly into it, the lee scuppers bubbling with a creaming wash like the first gush of wine from the bottle. Again, we moved slow and noiseless with barely steerage-way, the dappled sky holding tantalizing promise of wind that held off but ultimately blessed us and coaxed us along.

All this time I bent my mind to the

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acquisition of sea-practise, learning much from Black Michael. He was a sailor born. With navigation mastered there could have been no better captain. But his untrained brain refused to grip the mysteries of mean and apparent time, of its equation, of lunar correction and double altitudes, of compass dip and variation and heeling error. The mechanics of his craft he knew thoroughly, almost by instinct, its mathematics were to him what Greek is to a gutter urchin.

"I can no more hold figures than water can stay in a sieve," he told me, looking longingly at the sextant I held one nooning. "Or than my purse can keep guineas. 'Tis no use, for I have tried at times. In the Caribbean, look ye, where I know current and spit and all the tricks of wind and water as a blind man learns a highway, there I can handle a ship and play captain by the very smell of things; but, put me on the high seas and I'm a baby till I see land, save that I can guess the knots we make and come pretty close to leeway. It's different with you, being, by nature as it were, a scholar."

I liked the man. He was elemental, a savage who followed the wish of the moment and kicked reckoning aside so long as he won to his heart's desire, which was to gratify his primitive instincts by the use of his strength. He was a magnificent brute, with a hawknose set in his black bush of a face, a neck as muscular as the rest of him, ruthless, cruel and yet, I fancied, he would play fair where once his respect was won.

He respected my ability to set down our position on the chart, to be able to say that, with such and such a wind, at such and such an hour, land would rise out of the wide sea spaces, and to give that land a name. But Jacobs could do that and Michael must offset my present knowledge with his own superiority in the details of sheer seamanship.

As a man I had not proved up to him and somehow I must attain mastery. It was a great hazard, sailing to find loot with a dozen men aboard whose lives had been given to the easy gathering and quick spending of ravished treasure, but Michael and his men—whom he absolutely led—must be commanded. Theirs was the habit of obeying orders under the somewhat loose discipline of buccaneer regulations and we must form the habit of command.

In this, of course, I did not count Frank Madden, for all the lad's fancies, and I was beginning to have my doubts of Sir Richard. It was at his express desire that we touched at Madeira for we were in no shortage of water. It was indeed the filling of casks that Sir Richard desired, but not with water.

I had seen his liking for strong liquor, it showed in the broken veins of his ruddy, handsome face, and I had noted since we had been at sea and he had more leisure at his disposal—for he did not, or would not, take interest in the handling of the ship—that he sat after meals with the bottle ever before him and bore always the aroma of wine about him.

One night he had shown in his gait and in a disposition to free talk that he had drunk more deeply than wisely. Young Madden looked at him with contempt that was not intended to be hidden and, after Sir Richard had gone below, the lad turned to me with a sneer.

"My guardian-uncle is tipsy," he said.

"Hardly that, I think."

"You will mayhap recognize the condition better as the voyage goes by," he said.

Many gentlemen drank deeply those days. It was an attribute of aristocracy to decant rare wines and be able to descant about them also. I am far from a precisian or, I hope, a prig, but I have ever found the second bottle conductive of a muggy head next morning and I prefer the abstinence to the headache—though there have been, and are occasions when I prove my rule by its exceptions.

Sir Richard vaunted the wines of Madeira. Madeira itself, made of the mixing of black grapes with white, Tinta and Verdelho, Bual, Sercial and Malmsey, and naught would do but he must secure a cask or so of each variety. It was not for me to point out too strongly the delay. I was still in his employ and, curiously enough, young Madden did not protest against the loss of time.

There had been no further hints of treachery since I had found the tip of the knife-blade in the binnacle. The split between Michael's men and the rest of the crew increased and Jacobs showed a disposition to side with his own in petty disputes. Also, it seemed to me, he was slack in hoisting extra sales when the breezes warranted, considering the stress

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we had laid upon the necessity for a fast trip, but this was a question of sea-judgment that I could not well dispute. In my own watches I crowded canvas as I could, only to find the kites taken in again as soon as Jacobs came on deck. All this made for friction and soon some sparks would fly, I felt certain.

WE ANCHORED off Funchal at dawn. Sir Richard arranged to go ashore at the earliest moment. He carried letters to certain merchants from whom he expected to secure his wine. Frank Madden was to go with him, excited over the prospect of seeing a strange country. I myself was anxious to see something of the mountainous island and planned to follow them later, after I had attended to certain duties, determining to expedite the shipment of the wines.

It seemed strange that I, with the smallest stake in the treasure, should be the one keenest to avoid delay. The golden glaze that I had seen in Sir Richard's eyes when the hoard was first mentioned seemed to have been diverted by another lure, the amber notes that danced in wine while, to the lad, the newest diversion was the most alluring.

To Captain Jacobs, Funchal was nothing new, he said, and he doubted whether he would go ashore.

Immediately beneath the poop deck was the main cabin, lit on three sides by windows to port and starboard and those that gave directly on the mid-deck. It was subdivided aft into three rooms, two small cabins with a larger in the center, glazed by the stern ports. The mid-cabin was that of Sir Richard and Frank Madden, that to port mine and, to the starboard, Captain Jacobs'.

The *Golden Hope* was surrounded by native craft heaped with tropic fruits, oranges, lemons, mangoes, loquats, custard-apples, figs, bananas, pineapples and sugar cane, a medley that delighted the eye and gave out strange, intoxicating odors. The sailors eagerly bought them and I watched their chaffering with the eager, chattering Portuguese boatmen when Black Michael came to my side as I stood at the rail. We had forbidden shore leave, fearing difficulty in getting the men aboard again.

"A word with thee, Mr. Penrith," said the giant. "In private."

He stepped suddenly aside with a rough order to one of the men to replace a fallen coil and, as I turned, I saw Jacobs close behind us. He had come up noiselessly.

"I am going ashore, Mr. Penrith," he said. "I shall be back by morning. I doubt if our shipment will arrive before then. We sail on the flood this evening, an hour after sunset."

"Very well, sir," I answered, as he ordered his boat.

When it was well under way I told Michael to come to my cabin. I motioned him to a seat and set out a bottle and glasses. He swallowed his grog slowly and leaned forward folding his muscular arms, bare to the elbows, on the table.

"Look ye, Mr. Penrith," he said. "I have no fine words. I talk as I am, plain and rough, but 'tis not my intent to cross ye or go beyond my business."

"Go ahead," I said.

"I know not the purpose of this voyage, nor care. There is much whispering aboard and a man may make a guess. I carry no tales and stand on my own bottom. Yon singing lubber, Pike, that calls himself Chantey-Sam, and loves to prate of his own villainies, yarns to the crew of the glory of a pirate life and swells to his own crowing. I have seen things, aye, and done them, that would make Pike fall to his marrow-bones and shiver, but that is past. Me and those that are with me are free men, with the king's pardon.

"These arms of mine—" he closed his fists and the muscles swelled and rippled—"have been dyed red with blood to their pits and the blood was of my shedding. The rest of the crew are muck, deck-scrapings, without the spirit of a mouse between 'em. They listen to Pike as a child does to a ghost yarn. 'Tis Sir Richard who hires them but 'tis to Jacobs they look for orders.

"Now this ship is metalled like a king's ship—or a privateer?" He shot a look at me. "Ye have not drilled us for naught. If it means fighting, so much the better. But meanwhile there is deviltry aboard, of another sort."

"Why do ye not speak to Sir Richard?" I asked him.

"There are times when all must be said. Now, look ye, Mr. Penrith, the rasp of strong liquor tickles my throat. There be times when I crave it, when my mood leaps to its impulse as a blood-horse to the

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whip. But 'tis a pick-brain. It may fire those who follow but 'tis not for those who issue orders. Brains may lead me and courage, but not the kind that comes out of a bottle. No man ever tippled steady and kept his brains clear——"

"I can not listen to such talk," I said severely.

He looked at me and nodded, with a certain good-natured tolerance, such as an old mastiff might bear to the youngster who essays to correct it.

"Aye, aye, sir. Enough said. Ye have eyes of your own. Yet some one must be master, and Captain Jacobs is a villain."

He took a case knife in a buckhorn setting from his pocket and opened it.

"Have ye the metal ye found in the binnacle? I'll warrant it mates to the end of this blade."

I had kept the fragment but I saw without trying that it had been broken from the knife in front of me.

"Where got ye this?" I asked.

He winked at me.

"'Tis a poor thief that can not pick a pocket," he said. "Jacobs should have thrown it overboard. I think the loss of it has worried him a trifle."

"You got this from the captain's person?"

"Aye! Belike he would deny it against the word of a poor quartermaster. Yet 'tis his. Nor is that all. I know the waterfront of Funchal as I know that of a hundred ports. I have not been here for five years. In those days I was a sea-buck, I shaved to go ashore and pressed a smooth cheek to my Moll, not knowing they preferred the scrape of a beard for all their protest to roughness. I saw a man I know this morning and he might have known me but for this beard.

"He came out in a bumboat, gunwale-deep with fruit, yet cutting throats is more in his line than slicing pineapples. His price was high and he seemed in no hurry to sell. But, when Captain Jacobs came on deck, the man accosted him. Nor did his mightiness disdain to answer him. As for me, I slipped to the lower deck and took station by a gun port with the two of 'em, one above and one below, talking past my head.

"The man is 'Yellow Jack,' and the name suits him. He is the biggest rogue and robber of seamen ashore in Madeira, save one, his master, 'Funchal Pete,' Pedro Vasquez, crimp, throat-slitter of drunken seamen, half-nigger-half-Portugee, devil's spawn, a spider who spins webs for sailors. He has a woman—but that yarn is not for now. I have a score of my own with him that is not yet settled, though he bears part of the count where my knife creased him. Yellow Jack talked Portugee with Jacobs and I know some of that lingo. He brought a message from Vasquez and 'tis to see the latter that the skipper goes ashore."

"Is that all you heard?" I asked.

"All? When the captain of a ship consorts with such a rascal there is some deviltry afoot. What it is, I know not. They will take care to talk their plans where none can come at them. I have warned ye. I have done deeds that they might hang me for, had I not the king's pardon, but I have done them in the open. I like ye, lad. Ye are Devon stock and ye have mettle in ye. I am no turncoat nor priestfollower, I pack my sins on my own back and will answer for them when needs be, but the pardon has made me an honest man again and I have a notion, when the time comes that I can no longer stand my trick nor hold my own with the best, to spend the rest of my days without wanting to hide at sight of king's crown or button or baton.

"Watch Jacobs, say I, watch him like a hawk does a rabbit in the fern and, when the time comes for swooping, whistle to me and I'll stand back of ye with ten good men beside. Ye were bred to stand on quarter-deck, Mr. Penrith, as I was bred for fo'ksle. I've tipped ye, 'tis your brains must tackle it."

There was a knock on the door. Wells, one of Michael's men who acted as boatswain, announced the arrival of a lighter alongside bearing six casks of wine and a message from Sir Richard that he would be aboard by mid-afternoon.

MICHAEL left to see to the stowage and I pondered over what he had said. That Jacobs would set his word against Michael as to the knife I had no doubt. There was bad blood between them. The ship was divided. Our main end was to carry through the voyage successfully. As to Jacobs' affair with Pedro Vasquez, it would be hard to pin him to any breach of faith there without direct

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evidence. He could concoct a dozen reasons or deny the whole thing.

As a confessed pirate, professing a sudden change of heart, Black Michael might not be worthy of special credence. His talk with me had been savored with flattery that might cover his own ends. But Jacobs must be watched for the first sign of overt treachery and then, if action was taken, the handling of the ship would fall upon me, inexperienced and the youngest of all on board, save Frank Madden. And I depended much upon Michael's sea-lore. It was a good deal of a coil and must be set for conference with Sir Richard.

Jacobs came aboard at eight bells, suave and secretive as to his mission ashore. I did not feel licensed to leave the ship with Sir Richard imminent. At seven bells he came off with Frank, his face flushed. I fancied he had been liberal in his sampling of the wines he had selected but there was other cause to his excitement.

"Ye were right, Penrith," he said, when we were all three closeted. "Levison is in this. The schooner *Falcon* came to Funchal two days ago. She is one of Harris & Harris' vessels, I learned. She stayed outside the harbor. None came ashore but one boatload and Simeon, or a man of his description, was in her. He visited none of the merchants but the clerk of one, who is a man to whom I bore a letter, saw the boat land at the wharf where he was tallying cargo and mentioned it. The whole thing came up casually when I chanced to ask if any ship had called lately from home."

"Did the clerk note where Simeon, if 'twas he, went while ashore?"

"I did not ask. The man was busy. Why?"

"Because I have an inkling." And I told them what Michael had said.

"It looks strange," said Sir Richard. "Strange on all sides. I do not doubt your judgment, Penrith, for ye have proven yourself right concerning Simeon, or so it seems. But I doubt your wisdom in letting Michael make a confidant of ye. The man is a confessed rogue. He will bear watching as much as Jacobs. And we need both of them. We must keep strict guard."

"Why should he malign Pike?" broke in Frank Madden hotly. "Sam's interests lie with ours. If there is any talk of piracy in the crew I'll warrant it lies with that gang of sullen rogues you shipped."

It was the first time that the lad had shown umbrage at me. Since I had taken over the duties of mate I had not seen much of him. My tutorship had entirely gone by the board. I knew he spent much time with Pike, but I had thought him friendly with Michael and his men also. I said nothing, except to express the natural suggestion that we must waste no time getting to our island. I marveled at Simeon himself undertaking the voyage, thinking that his type would rather pull his strings in London among the money-changers than adventure his person.

"Ye can not sail till after sunset," I said. "The schooner may have the heels of us or she may have started first, but once we strike the steady west winds below Capricorn we should overhaul her driving."

"I'll run that double-dealing dog through his treacherous heart," cried Sir Richard.

"If you catch him, nunky," said Frank dryly. "Or if your hand is steady enough," he muttered under his breath to me.

Sir Richard did not appear to hear him, but sent for Peter, ordering him to broach the cask of Madeira that had come aboard.

"'Tis marked with three red crosses, Peter," he said. "Draw off plenty and let it settle. If 'tis quiet enough after the shipping to sample now, shal't taste a generous vintage, Penrith."

I excused myself on plea of work to do. The fair, clean prospects of the trip seemed tangled. Frank's contempt of his uncle's authority grew daily, Sir Richard was fuddling his brains, Simeon was ahead of us, the ship's company was at rough ends. Fenton, with his two thousand guineas in hand, appeared to be the wisest man of all.

A *felucca*, its lateen sails furled, lusty, bronze-skinned rowers tugging long oars against the ebb, was making for the sea. A red-capped man in coarse shirt, short linen breeches that left a line of brown flesh between them and a pair of yellow boots, was at the helm. He looked toward the *Golden Hope* as they passed us and I saw Jacobs on the poop gazing at them.

Michael came to where I stood and started to overhaul a halyard.

"There goes Funchal Pete now," he said. Yellow Jack's beside him. Look at the skipper watch them. There's deviltry afoot."

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"Dost think they mean to board us at sea?" I asked, half in jest.

"I wish they would," said Michael. "I know not what's doing but there's something in the wind."

Suspicion breeds mistrust as corruption breeds maggots. When I joined Jacobs on the poop I thought I saw a light of mockery in his eyes as he greeted me and fell to talking of our course.

At dinner Sir Richard was drunk. For the first time his speech was thick and his feet uncertain. He said something about a headache and went into his cabin. When Frank opened the door later to get a heavier jacket I heard his uncle snoring. The lad turned to me with a twisted smile.

"I have a fine guardian, have I not?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIV

FUNCHAL PETE

AT MIDNIGHT the weather changed. The shifty wind headed us and once more the *Golden Hope* butted the sullen seas. The dawn came through a frowning sky, the sun peeping through gray clouds and then retreating, the sea leaden colored, black in the hollows, lifeless, heavy. We barely made an average of six knots.

Sir Richard came from his cabin late, sullen from his indulgence in wine. The weather seemed to affect the crew. Jacobs' men stood about in groups, sullen under orders. Only Jacobs himself seemed unconscious of any indifference. His trip ashore had changed the rotation of our duty so that he took the first watch of the night which left me free to dine at the first table in the cabin with Sir Richard and Frank Madden.

At sunset we were snugged down, but making dirty weather of it. The chart and our reckoning showed us some fifteen miles from the Selvagens, a group of ununhabited rocks between Madeira and the Canaries. Our course would pass too close to the weather side of them for my liking. It was doubtful if the moon would show and a lee shore was none too pleasant a prospect. But Jacobs was not like to wreck us on such hazardous reefs and they had not been sighted before darkness shut down as I went below, leaving the captain in charge.

Sir Richard was trying another of his vintages and growing, first mellow, then sleepy under its influence. He turned in early, and the lad, who had been moping all the gray day, followed him. I copied their example, hoping for a cat-nap before my time came to take the deck. We were ramping through the seas, closer hauled than we should be, I judged, from the fuss she made of it. Rodriguez was at the wheel, Michael was to relieve him on my watch. Consistently, it seemed to me, Jacobs tried not to get the best out of her. But, sailorwise, my troubles vanished with the closing of my eyes and I dropped off.

I awoke with the fancy that some one had lit the lamp in my cabin. It was dark and the seas hissed and pounded as they raced around the stern to the seething wake. I lay for a moment looking up at where the leaping foam disclosed the window. It seemed to me I heard something above the rush of the waves—the steady roar of breakers. Then a flash showed, astern and to port, the mere winking of a flare as we fell into a valley, drowned by the wash as we rose again. I jumped to my feet. We were off the Selvagens and the light was ashore.

I remembered Michael's warning and the *felucca* that had put to sea with Yellow Jack and Funchal Pete. I could tell by the pitch of the vessel that we were being hove to. The sea was not too high for a cleverly handled boat to lay alongside. My half-jesting remark about being boarded might be the truth. My clothes were on, save my sea boots. I hurried into them, belted on my sword and thrust two pistols in my belt, all my senses on the alert, my suspicions quickening.

My door was fastened from the outside.

I hammered on the dividing wall with the butt of a pistol and heard Frank's voice call out.

"See if you can get me out," I called. "My door is bolted!"

There was a moment's pause before he shouted back.

"Ours too. What's wrong?"

I could see nothing from the window ports but a vague weltering of sea. We were pitching heavily, without headway. I flung myself at the door. The stout oak mocked me.

We were fairly trapped. The flare had been a signal, either from the shore or the *felucca*, answering one from the deck.

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Doubtless Michael and his men, all save the two or three who were in the present watch, were cooped up in the fo'ksle. The two or three had been overpowered, surprised. Funchal Pete and Yellow Jack, with their boatload of brown-skinned rascals, would take the ship. Jacobs was afraid of his own cowards in case of any chance of resistance on our part. It had all been planned by Simeon. We would be—what? Murdered like sheep or, at the best, marooned on the lonely Salvagens.

The memory of my climb from the river to the deck of the bark came to me. But now there was no friendly hawser to give me footing to clamber over the sternwork scrolls and gain the taffrail. Yet I might make shift to work along the counter-ledge and break into Jacobs' own cabin. The windows were of heavy glass and doubtless locked. But the door would not be fastened. If I could do it, I could free Sir Richard and the lad. One of us might break through forward and free Michael and his men. The arms were in the main and Sir Richard's cabin, save for the knives the men carried with them.

I unscrewed the fastenings of the stern windows to my cabin. What was to be done had to be done quickly. Jacobs would not long remain hove to off a lee shore. Funchal Pete's men would be aboard any moment. I slid back the heavy casement and straddled the sill, feeling for the ledge. It was perilous work to claw along, clinging to the gilded flourishes while the vessel reared and pitched, but I made it, passing Sir Richard's cabin, where they had lit a lamp, and beating at the heavy glass of Jacobs' window with the hardwood butt of my pistol, metal capped. It splintered, shattered and fell inward to my desperate smashes, all noise swallowed up in the boom of the seas.

I reached in to the turnscrews and worked them, clambering through to the cabin and from that to the main room and Sir Richard's door. The poop lantern threw glimmering rays to the mid-deck and I glimpsed a huddle of figures at the lee rail. The door had been lashed by the iron handle of its latch to the mizzenmast that rose through the main cabin. Mine was fastened likewise. I slashed the ropes of both and released Sir Richard and Frank, half-dressed. The lad's eyes shone and he carried a pistol in one hand.

"What is it?" he asked. "Mutiny?"

I told them hurriedly what I feared.

"Let me go aft," said the boy. "I can feel my way. Ye say they are at the lee rail. I'll pass to starboard."

He darted from us with incredible speed, thrusting himself along with his stick, while Sir Richard, still stupid from the fumes of wine, grasped at my arm.

"Come on," I cried. "They'll kill the lad!"

THERE was a sudden commotion forward and I jerked myself loose from Sir Richard with an oath. Frank dodged back into the main cabin as I reached the door.

"Michael's out," he cried. "They've broken loose. There are men coming over the rail."

I glanced at the wall-rack. Half the cutlases and pikes were gone. The pistols were in the middle cabin with the muskets. Sir Richard, sobering, came out with an armful.

There was a bellow outside, a swirl of men and Black Michael burst through the press followed by Amber, Wells and two others.

"Boarded!" he yelled, his eyes glowing. "Give us arms. Get to the wheel, sir, and throw her off! We'll beat 'em back!"

He had grasped a pistol and snatched an ax from the rack. Sir Richard helped to arm the rest. They rushed out ahead of me, charging through the mob with a rally of shouts.

"To the poop," I called to Sir Richard, and made for the ladder.

Jacobs' cravens were scattering before the onslaught of Michael and his bullies. Over the side a score of ruffians were scrambling. At the poop-rail Jacobs fired at me as I mounted; fired and missed, dodging from the return of my pistol. Sword in hand, I sprang up the steps and parried his lunge. He was braver than I thought, relying perhaps on his skill at fence, which was far from mean. But I had him at the third lunge and he dropped with six inches of steel in his midribs.

There were two men at the wheel. A pistol barked over my shoulder and one of them fell. The second fled, Sir Richard in pursuit, and I jumped for the spokes.

Below, the fight raged with clash of steel and powder flashes. We were in

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deadly peril. I could hear the breakers pounding to port as the weather drove us down. Unless we could get sail out or anchors down within a few minutes we were lost. Sir Richard leaped past me to the break of the poop, his sword-blade red under the lantern-light, and jumped into the mêlée.

I could hear the roar of Michael as I steadied her. If only they had arms enough? Some one had cut the grapplings of the *felucca*. She scraped by, her mast above the rail, her yard catching for a second in the mizzen shrouds. Then she was gone astern. I dared not look for her though I heard shouts as the men left aboard brought her into the wind. We were setting down fast toward the reefs.

The fight swirled toward the poop, then back again. They were fighting in grim earnest now, with shouts muffled for want of breath, save for the rallying call of Michael. I could see but little of it, not daring to leave the helm, little as it served us, for lack of canvas, save to keep her head to the seas.

Then Michael came up the ladder, panting, his teeth agrin in his beard.

"'Tis over," he said, stepping across the limp body of Jacobs as he came toward me. "A brisk skirmish! A close touch! We broke fo'ksle in the nick of time."

He cast one look shoreward and jumped for the rail of the poop.

"Aft to the mizzen!" he roared. "Shake out the fore-royal, some of ye! Jump to it."

Four men tumbled up the ladder. One dripped blood from his forearm, the face of the second was scarlet, but they sprang to their work.

"Give me the wheel, sir," said Michael. "We'll claw out of this yet. Funchal Pete's dead. I gave him his quittance. Yellow Jack jumped for the *felucca* when we cut her loose. We've got Jacobs' lot in the fo'ksle. They'll be good dogs after this."

I descended to the main deck and found Sir Richard, puffing but triumphant.

"I sent Frank to the cabin," he said. "The young monkey was right in the edge of it. Shot a man that crowded me, e'gad. Beshrew me, but I'm dry."

The deck was a shambles. Ten Portuguese from the *felucca* lay slashed and pistoled. With them were two of Jacobs' men. Three of Michael's followers were badly hurt, one of them dead. I sent the wounded aft to the cabin where Sir Richard tended them and went to the fo'ksle where Jacobs' curs had been penned. They begged for mercy when they saw me.

"Throw down your arms, you mutinous dogs," I said, and they trooped out with hanging heads to where Amber drove them to duty.

The *Golden Hope* had got way upon her once again. Back on the poop Michael greeted me.

"We grip the wind. We'll clear. What did I tell thee, Mr. Penrith? Did I speak sooth about Jacobs?"

I nodded. We were not out of danger yet, but the ship fought gallantly to respond to the guidance of her helm.

"You're captain now," he said.

I had been thinking of that. I stooped over Jacobs. His eyes were filmed and there was a smear of blood on his mouth. I had killed my man! In fair fight and none of my seeking, but the sight sickened me.

"Shall we clear decks?" asked Michael. "No use keeping the sharks from supper. Will ye give the order?"

Chantey-Sam came swaggering up, his coarse shirt soaked in gore.

"Are ye wounded, man?" I asked.

"'Tis not my blood," he answered proudly.

"Nor none of your shedding," said Michael.

Sam glared, and made a step toward the wheel, but the giant only laughed.

"When didst thou crawl from the sail locker?" he asked.

CHAPTER XV

WE RUN OUR EASTING DOWN

SIR RICHARD held court martial in the cabin next morning. Jacobs' men stood submissive while he arraigned them. Little by little the truth came out in scraps that we could piece together. The captain had not admitted them to the reasons for the plot, but it was made evident that Sir Richard, young Madden and myself, with Michael and his fellows, were to be taken from cabins and fo'ksle after the *felucca* had made a boarding and disposed of. If inquiry had been made the blame would

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have been set upon Funchal Pete or laid to some unknown raider. The prearrangement of the whole thing pointed to Simeon.

"Rank mutiny," said Sir Richard. "I could hang ye all at the yard-arm for this or take ye back to Madeira for a gallows trial. As it is, I hold ye at my mercy."

They were a poor lot, as Michael had said, and they swore abject allegiance. The verdict was a foregone conclusion. We needed them and we dared not waste time to go back to Madeira in any event. We sent them back to their quarters.

And now Fate dealt us a run of luck. We passed the Canaries and the Cape Verde Isles and the airs, while variable, never failed us, so that we worked through the doldrums and neared the line with little delay. Always we hoped to catch a glimpse of the *Falcon*, for we were making record time, clumsy as the *Golden Hope* was at whiles.

At ten degrees north there came puffs of what Michael prophesied were the true Southeast Trades, and we spread all our kites to make the most of it.

I had determined to make our southing sufficient to get fairly in the region of the steady west winds if we had to drop to the Roaring Forties to find them, guided in my theoretical decision by Michael, who now practically acted as mate. The *Golden Hope* hung bravely on the breeze to a taut bowline and the ship's work went well. But never did we sight the *Falcon* or another sail, ahead or astern. We were a thousand miles from land and sailing a lonely sea.

With me the time passed swiftly in my endeavor to make an efficient navigator, but the hours hung heavily on Sir Richard, and he tried to speed them with the contents of his casks, growing stout and flabby and dull of eye.

As for Frank Madden, he spent the time quizzing Michael and his men of Davis, never tiring of hearing pirate lore. Chantey-Sam seemed to have swaggered down the suggestion of his cowardice and won a certain popularity with his ballads. Over the original crew he appeared to gain a sort of leadership. The rest tolerated him for his entertainment.

At the twenty-seventh parallel the Trade began to die, day after day, and for a week we swashed in the calms of Capricorn, swinging to all points of the compass in the great South Current that travels east to Tristan da Cunha.

To Michael I confided our desire to overtake the *Falcon*. Before long we should have to tell all hands of our venture but I held it off until the last, hoping to win Michael's fidelity. It was idle to pin too much credence to the professed change of heart of such a character, yet I liked the man and believed that he had achieved a sound liking for me. How far that would go with treasure in sight was hard to tell. Whether, if he proved honest, his men would jump with him, was another question.

There was talk forward, I heard some of it and guessed more. Whether it leaked from Peter or from Sam or from both of them, little by little, was hard to say, but all hands soon knew we were on a race for which there must be some substantial stake and knew too that we had, so far, defeated plans to delay us.

Michael seemed confident.

"We've had rare luck," he said. "We'll overhaul that schooner. Wait till we get even with the Cape—" He called it by Vasco da Gama's name, *Cabo de todos los Tormientos*. "Mark ye, I've rounded the Horn and talked with others and, when it comes to easting, the Tormented Cape is the windiest spot on all the seas. We'll see real waves there, with crests a mile apart. There's hot water from the Mozambique and cold from the South Sea Drift, all tumbling together on Agulhas Bank. Then she'll walk to the east'ard with the great wind driving her three knots to the schooner's two.

The west winds blew ever harder and the seas mounted. We took them aboard, lee and weather rail, over the taffrail itself; rolling and tumbling in cross currents till we had to rig preventer backstays to stop the masts from jigging out of her. The teak deck was ever wet and treacherous until young Madden, for all his nimbleness, was fain to stay in the cabin and send for Chantey-Sam to wile away his dull hours.

Even with Michael at the wheel, time and again a roaring comber, green and raging, crashed aboard abaft the foremast and floated the gear off the pins till the deck was strewn with tangled halyards and lines. And ever the *Golden Hope* flung herself buoyantly and stanchly across the tumult of the waters that came all ways at once, in pyramids and cones that tossed

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us till the reef-points pattered on the roaching crests of canvas, or dropped us into gulfs where we seemed to hang in midair before the keel gripped the unstable element once more.

At last, our southing made, we squared away across the longitudes, blown across the waste of waters. Never had I imagined such seas, seething white hills down which we rushed interminably, hunted down the yeasty planes and furiously worried on the long ascents, the seas breaking under the counter, mouthing the deck beneath the taffrail, while the *Golden Hope* rushed wildly, giddily along, a frightened thing, trying to break loose from the rudder like a shying mare from the curb.

Always there was sunlight and clear weather. A few clouds sometimes raced high above us, masses of *cumuli*. The water was intensely, glitteringly blue and the wind roared out of nowhere. We were always under reefs, tearing along like a cork in a millrace, making incredible speed, logging once three hundred and seven miles in twenty-four hours.

So we scudded past Cape Agulhas on the upper rim of the Roaring Forties and I consulted with Michael as to the northing we must make. In this I naturally gave closer hint to our destination, but he made no comment, save to advise a circle course until we reached the fiftieth line of longitude on our arc and thence coasting to the east of Madagascar rather than essaying the Mozambique Channel.

"We have the wind with us, look ye," he said. "In the channel there'll be current against ye and fluky breezes. If we're lucky we'll pick up the Trade again above thirty and go kiting north. This tub needs full sheets and a following wind to make her travel."

The next morning saw a gradual change come over the weather. The barometer announced it by slowly sinking. The sky seemed to lower until it brooded darkly over our mastheads. The deep sapphire of the seas changed to a livid, ghastly blue, then to a leprous white patched with dull green. The long rollers were felt, rather than seen, and the minor seas that were constantly born between them were beaten flat by the force of the gale. They became oily, the foam itself was thick and pasty and the spray of it stung the flesh. The force of it was blinding, choking. As it mounted the wind reaped and flung the spindrift harvest in level swathes.

Intermittently the light waxed and waned. The wind shrieked in the rigging and boomed like a perpetual drum in the canvas. Above it all there was a moaning in the air, audible to the ear and sensible to the spirit. The men stood about in anxious groups, the bravest and most reckless of them sobered. By noon the glass registered 25.60 and still dropped.

The sounds of air and water resolved themselves into a mighty whine and the sea was a swirl of white froth with only here and there black spots suggesting bottomless gulfs. Tuned to that awful whine was the fierce hiss of escaping air from the myriad of bubbles. For all its frightful aspect and the knowledge that we were speeding at a terrific pace, the ocean seemed sluggish, deliberate.

We had only a few yards of canvas exposed and that began to shred away from the yards, whirled ahead of us by the tempest. The wind, when we faced it, bore with the weight of a solid body. It was more than a "shouting" gale. Michael's mightiest bellow in my palm-cupped ear was torn away and I only saw the movement of his lips.

"A hurricane!" was what he was trying to tell me.

And still the glass fell.

We could not tell when evening came, save by the chronometer. There was no sun to go down, only the darkness gathered. Long lashes of knotted canvas trailed from the yards, cracking like explosions. The scuppers were a havoc of tangled gear. We made prodigious speed, but the following waves often overtook us and broke on the poop-deck. We were flying south now, the wind curving from southeast to south and into the southwest. Our bows shoveled up tons of steaming spray, half air, half water, that smothered the foredeck and burst out the ports. Two of the boats were in splinters, smashed from their falls.

Night wrapped us and still we staggered on in the gray, roaring wash. The glass ceased to fall, pumping for a while and at last it rose and the wind—unbelievable as it seemed—increased. There was a change in the quality of the air, from muggy and warm, it grew more bracing and at midnight I could sense an easing of the storm.

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A wan dawn found Michael and Amber at the wheel, battered, sunken of eye but grim of lip. Michael even essayed to smile at me. A red glare rose suddenly in the east like fire reflected upon smoke, murky, menacing above the leaping waste that turned the hue of coagulating blood. The sky split raggedly and showed glimpses of coppery green. It lifted for a moment above the jagged welter of the horizon and, far to leeward I saw for a brief second before the curtain rolled down, the pitching masts of a ship.

I looked inquiry at Michael and he grinned again and nodded.

They were the masts of a schooner—of the *Falcon*—the odds were a hundred to one in its favor! We had caught her at last and we had the weather gage.

CHAPTER XVI

SIR RICHARD BABBLES

AS IF to make amends, the conduct of the weather changed to long days of almost cloudless skies and creaming, sapphire seas with the sharp-cut facets of the rollers flashing back the sun and every wave seeming to give us a pat and a friendly boost upon our way; long nights when the stars throbbed like naked lantern flames and the moon turned the ship to a marvel of black and ivory, sailing on a sea of jet. With our damages repaired and the good wind at our backs we sped at top speed, confident that the square-rig of our foremast and our superior spread of canvas would keep us ahead of the *Falcon*.

Yet I saw signs of discontent growing, gradual, insidious. As was but natural, Black Michael and his men looked on the rest of the crew with some contempt and a disposition to assert superiority. The death of the comrade rankled, for one matter, and they blamed it on the mutineers. I did what I could to hold affairs in hand, arranging the personality of the watches to that end, but Sir Richard, as the ostensible promoter and head of the expedition, set a sorry example.

On the high seas he had little to employ his mind, none of his customary companions to look askance if he drank too deeply, no pride of position to maintain, naught to stand between him and the contents of the casks. Young Madden openly flouted his guardian and dodged any authority that I might attempt to hold over him in such little time as I found to spare from my ship duties.

So the original crew grew sullen, performing their duties in fear rather than willingness, and, little by little, the men of Davis adopted a more bullying attitude. Chantey-Sam espoused the cause of the underlings, though I had esteemed him a man to side with the stronger side or at least to curry favor with them. It became evident that he had established a sort of leadership. Smiles and nods, all covert, passed between them, and Frank Madden tagged Sam almost as closely as his shadow.

I spoke to Frank concerning this and its effect on discipline.

"I have seen nothing of all this," he answered. "If it were so, if there be aught of conspiracies, as you seem to fancy, I should be the first to discover it. Ye have made pets of Michael and his mates and the others may resent it, but that is all. They do naught worse than listen to Sam's tales and songs, as I do. Ye are all for Michael and his cutthroats. Watch them."

Black Michael came to me the same night.

"Look ye, Mr. Penrith," he said bluntly. "There is talk of treasure aboard."

"Who started it?" I asked.

"I know not. It is in every man's mouth of a sudden. It fits well with the manner of this trip. They say 'tis the treasure of Towne, buried on an island to the north of Madagascar."

"They say. Who says?" I demanded irritably.

"Sir Richard, for one."

"Sir Richard?" My jaw sagged for a second. "Sir Richard?"

"Aye, Sir Richard, in his cups. The men have taken to going to him with their grievances saying they can get no justice else from me—that I drive them too hard and ye will not listen to them."

"Why, this is mutiny again!"

"Hardly, when they can get the ear of the leader. What does he but order wine for them and tell them they will all be rich men before the month is up, that they should stick together and he will see they are rewarded. What more he said I know not. I but heard of it an hour ago."

"What talk was there of this treasure of Towne?"

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"Why there again, I know not, save that the men have made a jest of it and talk of how they'll spend their share when the squire—that's Sir Richard—comes into his kingdom. Not to me or my men, mind ye—we but overhear a word here and a sentence there."

He stood looking at me expectantly, his eyes sparkling. I took the bull by the horns.

"What if 'twere true, Michael. What if we go to unearth this treasure?"

He looked at me shrewdly and nodded.

"Why, gold is gold and hath certain qualities. For one thing, it makes the palm itch to hold it and then to spend it. I have seen Moors who could look at a puddle of black liquid in the palm of a slave-boy and see strange things that came true. So your sailor can gaze upon a guinea and see the fulfilment of the desires of heart and belly. Parson says gold can not unlock the gate of heaven, but 'tis sure a key to hell. Didst ever hear of Fiddlers' Green?"

I shook my head.

"Why, 'tis the sailor's paradise, seven miles 'tother side of hell, where drinks and smokes are chalked up and never paid and Jack dances with Poll and Moll to his heart's delight. Show a sailor a guinea and he sees Fiddlers' Green ahead of him instead of hauling wet ropes and gnawing bully. 'Tis the shimmer of it that makes the brain dizzy.

"A heap of it has slid through my fingers faster than spray through the weather rigging. It makes a lord of a tarry Jack for the time being, ye see, Mr. Penrith. He has not the wits to make it grow, but spends it for rum that turns his blood as blue as any high-born and makes him as good a man as his master."

"Till it's all gone."

"Aye, till he swallows the headache that's i' the bottom o' the last bottle and finds his loving lass is but a grafting trull. Ye're wondering what will Black Michael and Amber and Wells and the rest of Davis' men do when ye uncover the treasure? Mr. Penrith, a man's repentance, they say, lasts as long as a child may play with a new toy. I have never told ye I repented for my share o' doings before I sought the king's pardon and was excused for all my crimes and told to be a good dog. Davis came in to Providence with the rest because the free-trading did not pay longer.

"A buccaneer is a poor cur these days with every one licensed to take a shot at him and claim virtue. All the treasure this ship would hold would do me little good six months from now. Give me a guinea a week and I'm a rich man. Give me fifty thousand and next week I'll be thankful for small-ale to cool my coppers. Fair play and a fair share to all, say I. Ye provide the ship and the secret of where the treasure lies and owner's slice goes to ye. As for the rest, we look to ye to do the right thing and we'll stick."

It struck me that Michael, with his mention of gold making the brain dizzy was none too sure of himself or his men. His crafty speech was almost threatening for all its talk of fair play and fair sharing.

"It is neither my ship nor my secret," I said. "No doubt Sir Richard is inclined to do the right thing. He already pays high wages. But he is the head of the expedition."

"And you the brains, lad. You the brains! Talk it over. Plenty of time after treasure's aboard and we're in blue water again. But look out for Chantey-Sam. He was with Towne. Belike he knows where the treasure lies!"

IT WAS a sorry coil. Frank Madden hand in glove with Sam, Sir Richard babbling with a liquor-loosened tongue. I had never supposed that we could get the treasure secretly aboard without the men knowing of it, sooner or later, and I had surmised that they would expect some share above their wage. But there had been no opportunity to talk serious business with Sir Richard of late. I sent for Peter and questioned him.

"He has talked of treasure," said Peter, "and he has given a glass of wine to whatever fo'ksle varlet comes to the cabin with his troubles. A glass of wine instead of a round dozen at the gratings!"

"Why did ye not tell me?"

"Sir Richard is my master. Since ye heard of it, I'll tell what I know."

"Go on."

"The talk is all of what lies in the treasure and what a man could do with it."

"Among Michael's men?"

"Among all of them. Michael's men are serious and the rest laugh about it. That's the difference."

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"What says Chantey-Sam?"

"He says there is no treasure and laughs too. So does Master Frank. And they know he lies as he laughs and carry on the jest."

I dismissed him and summoned Chantey-Sam.

"Why did ye not tell me the ship was aboil with talk of the treasure?" I said.

"Since Sir Richard chose to talk of it, I supposed ye knew it. I have done my best to deny it. So has Master Madden."

He grinned impudently.

"You may go," I said coldly.

The thing lay on my shoulders. I must wait until I found Sir Richard both passing sober and reasonable, and take up with him and Madden the question of a certain share to be set aside for the crew. This would bring the matter to a head when we announced it and put an end to whispering and feverish conjectures.

It hurt me to feel that Frank Madden had all the time been cognizant of the happenings. I blamed myself for not having kept better control of him, but the handling of the ship had kept me occupied and his proper guardian had neglected his duties.

I could see trouble ahead. With any men, faith is best kept when the law is at hand to discipline a breach of it. And we were far away from any official control. Michael and his men were confessed outlaws—or had been—as was Chantey-Sam. We had only our own selves to rely upon and here was the lad almost estranged and Sir Richard incapable, or temporarily so.

Two mornings later he joined me on the poop close to noon. His once ruddy complexion was splotchy and his hand shaky as he held it out to me.

"Good morrow, Captain," he said. "Frank tells me we are nearing Madagascar."

"We are off the southern end of it now," I said. "But we are far to the east. The land trends northeast and southwest, we shall soon be close to its coast."

"Good!" He was making a strong effort to appear at ease, his old self. "I shall be glad to set foot ashore. Six weeks of shipboard is too much of a good thing. Hast seen anything more of the *Falcon?*"

"Amber reported that he thought he caught a glimpse of her last night at sunset, hull down, but he could not be sure. At any rate she was well astern."

"I have not been well of late," he said. "One of those Madeira wines—the Malmsey, I think—must have been overnew. "I saw he was watching me closely and made no comment. "There is some talk among the men, I understand," he went on.

"I have been meaning to mention it to you," I answered. "Shall we talk it over presently?" There was no reason in trying to undermine his self-respect and I think he appreciated my attitude.

"By all means," he said. "After we have eaten."

The three of us rehearsed the situation thoroughly, or rather, Sir Richard and I did. Frank Madden, perhaps because he knew that I must be aware of his preknowledge, though I did not mention it, seemed somewhat apathetic.

"There is plenty for all, by accounts," he said. "Give them an interest in it. I vote we double Penrith's share, to begin with."

To this Sir Richard agreed cordially, adding some courteous things about my handling of the ship. I was surprised at young Madden's motion, the more so as his liberality seemed to end at his lips. His eyes were more amused than friendly, as if the whole affair were something to make light of, as youth views riches.

Sir Richard made out the schedule. As Fenton was out of it, Chantey-Sam, at Frank's suggestion, was raised to three shares and the list read:

Adventurers' Shares (Sir Richard and Frank Madden)	48
Justin Penrith—captain	10
Sam Pike	3
Michael Goode—mate	3
Will Amber—quartermaster	2
Martin Wells—boatswain	2
Peter Higgins	2
The crew—one share apiece	30
	100

After the decision we called all hands, save the man at the wheel—Amber—to the break of the poop and Sir Richard harangued them.

"It is time, my lads," he said, "to acquaint ye with the purpose of this voyage." I saw ironical smiles exchanged between some of the seamen. "We are out for the treasure of Towne, the notorious pirate

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who met his just deserts at London some two months since."

There were more sniggers at this—some of them from Michael's men, to whom Sir Richard's moralities did not appeal."

"We shall deal fair with ye." Here Chantey-Sam started a cheer. "The loot will be divided into one hundred shares, one of which goes to each of ye with extra shares according to rank."

Here he read out the apportionment. I had expected some signs of objection, but none showed. They gave three more cheers and broke up into hilarious groups. Sir Richard ordered grog served out in liberal fashion, and soon they were all making merry with Sam, the center of the larger group.

A seaman's is a merry life,
  Around the world to wander,
In every port he leaves a wife
  To find another yonder.

So-ho, yo-ho, away we go,
  Across the ocean sailing,
From Plymouth to Per-nam-bu-co,
  Our stout hearts never quailing.

The landsman is a sorry wight,
  Ashore he has to molder,
His woman nags at him all night
  And feeds him on cold shoulder.

So-ho, yo-ho, away we go,
  Where gold and pearls are plenty,
Where's rum and good to-baccy-o
  And every lass is twenty.

Frank went forward to listen to the singing, and they greeted him with more cheers—with another tot of rum in mind, doubtless—while Sir Richard went below. I turned to Michael.

"Is that what ye call fair?" I asked. "It seems to suit most of them."

"Fair enough," he said. "But they take the news overeasily. I tell ye, Mr. Penrith, there's something in the wind forward. And Chantey-Sam's at the bottom of it. He's got the lad bewitched with his yarns as 'tis. There's something in the wind."

Just then a shout rang out. A man swarmed up the fore-rigging and stood in the cross-trees, waving. His shout fell back of us.

"*Land-ho!*"

Faint to the west, like the back of some great creature of the deep, a deeper stain against the blue sky, showed the land. Frank came swiftly limping aft, his eyes dancing, his face alight as he shouted.

"It's Madagascar. Madagascar-ho!"

CHAPTER XVII

WE REACH THE TREASURE ISLE

FOR A week we sailed north, parallel with the coast of the great island, nearly a thousand miles in length, sometimes close enough, on the inshore tacks, to watch the wonders of its verdure and out of sight of the crests of its backbone range, peaks evidently volcanic, broken into mighty bosses resembling spires, pyramids, domes, sometimes a mammoth cathedral or castle on the embattled heights. Great rivers surged down in leaping waterfalls to the sea, tall palms lifted above the denser foliage and masses of flowers, purple and white and gold, throttling the forest growths, showed far out to sea, as if a fairy carpet had been thrown over this footstool of the gods.

There were separate trees, seemingly leafless, and covered with scarlet bloom like giant geraniums, and Michael told strange tales of great waxen orchids that drugged with their perfume the unwary traveler and then closed down upon him with toothed petals and sucked his juices, releasing the dried body to augment the heap of skeletons of man and beast.

Both he and Chantey-Sam were in great demand, albeit they had separate audiences for the most part, and we all lived in a fairyland of spices, of gold and gems, of strange animals and birds whose feathers were worth a king's ransom.

The natives were friendly, Michael said, and told of pirate settlements established at Maritan and on Saint Mary's Isle. It was a paradise by all accounts and, as we sailed by its shores at sunset, the land silhouetted against the glory of the western sky in deep tones of amethyst and aquamarine, the sharp peaks soaring, the silver rush of the waterfalls; it seemed as if it might well be Eden found again.

Now and again we saw villages; some of them on the top of high hills, more by the shore, frame dwellings thatched and roofed with palm, and the chiefs' houses all of wood. Smoke curled quietly up and people clad in white mantles like Roman togas came to the edge of the beach and gazed at us. Occasional canoes floated not far

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from our course, but we pressed on, conscious of the treasure ahead and the *Falcon* close behind.

I was not without my own fair visions of what I might do with my shares and, sometimes, as I looked at Michael, gazing ever forward, I wondered what he held in his brain and what old desires and habits would come ramping back when he caught sight of the splintered chest in the pit as I had visioned it when first I saw the map.

At last we fetched level with the peak of Ambohitra. When it dropped below the horizon we would be twenty-four hours from the islands. Word of this had passed, for Chantey-Sam considered himself absolved from his promise of secrecy and the men stood at the rail watching it until nightfall found us north of Cape Ambro, the land's end of Madagascar.

At dawn Ambohitra was still visible, but fast diminishing, and a deputation of the men came aft with Sam as their spokesman. I sent for Sir Richard and Madden, who had arisen early, fired by the enthusiasm of the journey's ending and Pike made known the occasion.

"The men desire a quartermaster, an it please ye. Some one to represent them when the gold is unearthed. Ye will not be wanting all of us ashore."

"And they have chosen Chantey-Sam?" I asked ironically.

"No. I refused, for I have greater share than the rest. But it is the custom. This is the one."

He pushed forward one of the crew.

"Do ye speak for all?" I asked.

"Nay," said Amber, "not for us Davis' men. We need no other but Michael."

I looked at Sir Richard, who raised his eyebrows and nodded.

"Oh, give them half-a-dozen quartermasters, if they will," said Frank. We'll leave most of them on the ship, I suppose. They'll not be likely to desert with the treasure on the island."

"Hardly," I said. "All right, men. I'll name the landing party later and include your representative."

We settled on Michael, Amber, Hardy—the chosen quartermaster—and six others, three from Michael's following and three from Sam's, to go ashore. It was to be taken for granted that neither Sir Richard, Frank nor myself wanted to be absent when the treasure was uncovered. Sam, too, was to be of the party for better recognition of landmarks once we reached the clearing to which Towne had guided him blindfolded with the three other pirates who had carried up the gold and precious stones.

Young Madden spoke sound logic when he said that the men would not be likely to do anything but stay with the ship while we sought for the loot that was to make us all rich. For my part I could think of naught else but the successful ending to our hazardous voyage. The getting home would be an easy task, and, despite the grandeurs of this savage land, old England drew me.

I could see the old house at the head of the barren combe rehabilitated, acres that had slipped from the estate bought back again and the old name reestablished. Years seemed to have suddenly slipped from Sir Richard. He set aside the wine bottle that Peter brought him with a firm hand at the nooning meal.

"This time tomorrow should see us wealthy men," he said, and the light in his eyes was that of a man relieved of a long strain.

"We haven't got it yet, nunky," said young Madden.

Sir Richard glanced at him complacently.

"Near enough to be thankful," he said.

The remembrance of Simeon, of the quarrel I had witnessed from my window at Madden Hall, a hundred incidents, including Frank's treatment of his uncle and the latter's lack of resentment, took shape in my brain. In that moment I came close to the truth as I after learned it, that Sir Richard had squandered or in some way lost much of the moneys he held in trust for Frank Madden; that he had been borrowing from Simeon, who knew the circumstances, and that Frank Madden, by some uncanny insight or cleverness in piecing circumstances, knew it also, and that the finding of this treasure was to be the saving of Sir Richard's reputation and young Madden's fortune. I say I came close to the truth, but I was far enough away from the whole of it.

THAT afternoon young Madden slipped and fell on the deck. I did not see the accident, which happened somewhere forward, but Chantey-Sam bore him aft with great solicitation where he lay on a transom seat apparently in severe pain.

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"I shan't be able to go ashore after all," he said.

"We'll fix up a litter for ye," replied his uncle. "Where does it pain ye most?"

"I feel as if I had been twisted on the rack," he answered. "I'll to bed now."

I went on deck at midnight. There was a good breeze, but we seemed only to creep along while the stars fairly crawled as the constellations slowly turned.

Michael came up at eight bells to relieve me, but I stayed. Any moment should see the group rising from the sea. The sun shot up from an unruffled bed and swiftly mounted and still no specks met our straining eyes. Four bells came, and five, and at last I mounted the fore-rigging and stood on the royal yard above the bellying sail and looked far across the open sea.

A dot appeared and vanished. It came again and stayed, mounting inch by inch until a tiny cone projected from the waves. It was one of the cluster. Fenton's map had not lied. It might be the cone of the treasure isle itself.

The deck soon crowded with the news, men on the lower rigging, Sir Richard in the bows, discipline forgotten in a common comaraderie of hope. I took the news to Madden in his bunk. The lad seemed feverish, but I set most of it down to excitement which would, I trusted, also prove a panacea.

He was hurt too badly to even come on deck, he said. Presently he would try it, and, meantime, would I ask Chantey-Sam to come to him?

At noon we were splitting the sea to the north of the group, heading up for the island of our desire. As Sam and Fenton had said, three of the islets were but coral rocks and we kept well out to avoid the spurring reefs.

Sam pointed out the isle on which they had been wrecked. Through the glass I made out the hull of a vessel, the remains of the *Scourge*.

At last the island was in plain view. A tall peak flanked by woods, high cliffs here and there, a promontory reaching far out, and, as we cleared it, the deep indentation of the map.

With a man aloft to con for reefs and shallows, we sailed into the long bay with the wind abeam and, off the mouth of the little creek, dropped anchor in twelve fathoms. The voyage was over, the *Golden Hope* had proven worthy of her name.

The long-boat was swiftly launched, the landing party armed and furnished with picks and mattocks. Sir Richard carried the map and loaded one of the men with flagons drawn from his precious wine casks.

"The loot must be duly christened," he said.

Frank could not be taken from his bunk. I offered to stay with him, but he strenuously refused. And he had persuaded Chantey-Sam to stay aboard, if we would grant it. He looked so wistful that Sir Richard, after another talk concerning the landmarks, consented.

"I'll bring back the pick of it for you to play with," I told him. "I'll load this bunk of yours to the side-boards with loot."

He looked at me rather strangely and held out his hand.

"What's this for?" I asked.

"For luck," he said. "You've been very good to me. If I have seemed ungrateful, remember that I am warped in more ways than one."

Sir Richard shouted at me from the main cabin and Sam came in to play companion. He seemed willing enough to stay. The liking between the two seemed of genuine stuff, strong enough to offset Sam's avarice and desire to see the treasure uncovered.

"That's all right," I said to Frank. "Good-by."

He did not speak, but turned his face to the cabin wall as I went out, sensible of the keen disappointment he must feel. He was but a lad, and, after all, it was his pirate, his map and his money, and now luck had kept him from the very crux of the adventure.

We rowed swiftly to the mouth of the little creek and disembarked. There was no trail along the stream. Mangroves masked its entrance, but soon they gave way to the wild luxuriance of the jungle. There were birds of fiery plumage—Michael called them sun-birds—chatteringly disputing our path, once a large lizard darted across an opening and I saw a great boa coiled about a tree.

We crossed through a bed of gigantic arums twelve-feet high, the white lily-spathes a foot in length, a flock of butterflies dancing above them.

It was very hot and we were soon drenched with sweat. Also, save for the birds, it was very quiet. At length we

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came to the ravine marked on the map. Here the gap of the stream widened and we saw, close to a baobab tree that stretched its suckery roots over many rods of ground, the mouldering remains of a village; rotting frame timbers and patches of weathered grass thatch. But nowhere a sign of natives.

Up the ravine we clambered to where the timber showed dense and thick. Somewhere, in the heart of those trees, was the clearing with the spring and the rock at the foot of which lay the grave of Towne's ambitions and his gold.

In the forest a deep twilight reigned. Creeping growths were festooned from trunk to trunk, under foot and over head, twining about us with thorny tendrils and suckery tips that bore weird growths of flesh-colored flowers that smelled like decaying flesh themselves and powdered us with a sticky pollen that speedily made us loathsome with the stink. There were shafts that shot up out of sight and others that twisted along the ground like enormous snakes.

The sharp edges of fan palms cut our clothing and bodies, the forest seemed in a conspiracy to hold us back. It seemed haunted, too, with strange whisperings and murmurs. Time and again we stopped, convinced that the sounds we heard were human, and, holding ready for attack, struggled on again southwest by the compass.

Presently occasional flecks of sunshine showed and the trunks began to scatter. The clearing was close at hand. Shuffling eagerly along, we broke through the outer ranks of the trees and looked across a space where the rock came close to the surface and comparatively low herbage grew in scanty clumps. I saw the gleam of water, and, conspicuous against the forest on the farther side, a monolith of stone like those on Stonehenge.

We were too breathless to shout, and Sir Richard leaned against a tree exhausted. Suddenly there was a whirr above my head. An arrow had sunk deep into the bark. Another flirted through the skirt of my coat as I stepped back. One of the seamen dropped with extended arms, the barbs of the winged dart sticking out between his shoulder-blades. In a trice we had all sought cover while a shower of arrows whistled by us.

CHAPTER XVIII

COMPLICATIONS

STARTING out of the dark skirts of the wood into the sun-drenched clearing, I saw the herbage waving slightly in one of the denser clumps. There was practically no wind. I gave my orders and we raked the spot with our muskets. There was a yell, and a score of men, olive skinned, lighter than I had expected, broke from cover and fled, followed by our bullets. One of them dropped, and his comrades picked him up and sped for the farther forest, scattering and dodging so that we failed of further execution.

For a few moments we held a hurried council. To go back through the dense forest where such a foe held all the advantage seemed folly. The men on the ship could more readily defend themselves than we could. In the clearing lay the treasure, and, more precious at the moment even than gold, the spring of water. We were all parched with thirst. There were Sir Richard's flagons of wine, but the sparkling water was what we craved.

"There's but a score of them," I said to Michael. "Think ye it is a large tribe?"

"I know not. Not over a hundred I should judge. The big island and the small ones are split up by a thousand tribes, each with their king. But usually they are friendly to whites unless they have been abused. Let us get some water and then make our way back for reinforcements to the ship. They have respect for our guns where they can not creep up on us and we have flushed them from the clearing."

We made the sortie to the spring in quick rushes and swiftly sated ourselves with the cool water. Sir Richard sank his flagons in the bubbling spring to cool them. We had brought the wounded man along, but his case was hopeless. He essayed to speak as I bent over him, but blood filled his mouth and I could only guess at two random words—"the ship."

Only a few paces away the tall stone stood like a monument of Tantalus. To attempt to dig about it so close to the timber was folly. Occasional arrows, shot in high curves, flickered down among us. We had brought no food.

We must hide the picks and mattocks and get back to the ship, I said, and we

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stowed them deep beneath the long mosses that draped a niche between two tilted ledges from which the spring issued.

We fired a volley toward our foes and prepared to get back to the ravine, but, as we made our first short sally, a cloud of darts and arrows fell about us. We were surrounded. Back we went to the herbage by the spring, taking what shelter we could among the rocks. Save for the scattering arrows, we were safe for the present and could command any sorties the savages might make. One shaft scored Sir Richard's cheek and another stuck fair into the soil between the fingers of my outstretched hand.

As we lay there we heard shots, faint, persistent, then silence.

"The ship," said Michael. "They have beaten them off."

It seemed likely.

"In that case they will realize our plight," I said. "Madden knows which way we have gone. Our shots will guide them."

We fired whenever the savages seemed active and lay grilling in the afternoon heat, thankful for the spring, sharing Sir Richard's wine for lack of more solid stimulant. But we heard no more shots save our own, and, as the shadows from the forest and the central peak stretched out across the clearing, we slowly abandoned hope of rescue.

"They'll rush us at dark, I suppose," I said.

"Not they," said Michael. "They are afraid of it save when the moon is high and their conjurers make special charms. The moon rises late. They'll try to shoot us out of cover at sunset, but after that, if we can find our way through that cursed wood down to the ship, we're safe enough till dawn when we can teach them a lesson with our cannon."

That was some consolation and it proved sooth. Just before darkness came arrows fell thick from all sides of the clearing. Two of the men were wounded, though not seriously and, as the tropic night sank swiftly, the attack ceased.

"Shall we tackle the treasure?" I asked.

"To perdition with it till I have lined my stomach," said Sir Richard, echoing my own sentiments, and, without doubt, those of the rest.

We waited half an hour, fired a volley that brought no response and crept as quietly as we could back to the fringe of the forest, leaving the loot still buried.

The trip to the beach was a nightmare. The creeping vines and limbs that had snagged us by day stretched out a myriad hands to clutch us. Despite the compass, glimpsed by an occasional sulfur splinter from my box, we lost our way repeatedly, and at length only discovered the ravine by almost tumbling over its cliffs. We were six hours and over in the cursed trap, and a sorry band of adventurers when we broke through to the beach at last out of the mangroves.

The moon was just rising above the promontory, flooding the inlet with light. The *Golden Hope* was gone. So was the long-boat from the shingle.

We looked at each other in amazement that bordered on despair. It seemed impossible that the savages could have captured the barkentine, or, gaining it, have sailed it successfully out of the inlet. Yet it was gone.

I climbed the cliffs back of us, hard put to it from want of food, making the ridge by luck more than strength or judgment. There was no sign of the *Golden Hope*. But something was gliding over the waters like a phantom ship to cross the moon path on the calm sea and show revealed for a moment in every graceful detail. It was a schooner. It must be the *Falcon* heading for the open sea!

SPURRED by my news I descended recklessly and found Sir Richard and the rest grouped about Michael, who was stooping over something that lay half in half out of the water. A closer sight of it forestalled my own story. It was the body of Wells, brought in by the tide that was just beginning to flood. The man's shirt had been torn away by a rough grasp, or perhaps the current, and the blue mouth of a wound showed above his heart.

"Look," cried Michael. "This was no arrow! Here is a bullet wound. No islander killed him. There has been treachery aboard the ship! Poor Martin. I'll revenge ye on the dogs! Cast along the shore lads, there may be others."

His fear was well founded. Two more corpses were cast up by the waves, and each of them was a man of Michael's following. How many more the sea might hold we could only guess. One man had been

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shot through the temple at close range, the powder stains surrounding the wound, the other body showed the deep slash of a knife in his back.

"Treachery," shouted the giant, glaring about him so that Hardy and the two men—one had been killed in the skirmish—selected by Sam to go ashore shrank back. "See, stabbed i' the back and a pistol clapped to t'other's head. Chantey-Sam's work. I'll strangle the cur! Amber! Knowles! Pierce! Yates!"

His mates surrounded him, weapons out. I drew my sword and stepped between them and the three sailors, Sir Richard backing me.

"Hold, Michael!" I cried. "Ye know not for certain what has happened. In any event these three had naught to do with it. There are but eleven of us against the savages. We must stand together. Have you gone mad?"

For the moment he had. The blade of his cutlas grated harshly against my sword so that the sparks flew. I felt the iron strength of his wrist and forearm as I parried and the clash of steel behind me told that Sir Richard was engaged. There was no time for fancy fencing. Fortunately, Michael tried to use his point or his sheer force might have battered down my guard. As it was I caught the end of his blade in my hilt-guard and, with a sudden twist, disarmed him. His cutlas flew off and stuck upright in the wet sand while Michael leaped back with a look of almost ludicrous astonishment.

I tossed aside my own sword and sprang forward, grasping at his hand.

"Michael. Art crazy, man?"

The rest were at it. A pistol cracked. Then another. I caught Michael's bloodshot glance and held it. Slowly the madness died from it. He broke loose my grasp and threw up his arm.

"Stow it, lads, the skipper's right."

He caught up his cutlas and ran with me between the combatants striking up their weapons. Sir Richard, pressed for wind, was still easily warding off the thrusts and cuts of Amber. Before our onslaught the skirmish ended.

"Ye ought to be ashamed, men," I said. "Keep your weapons for the islanders."

"Question them, Mr. Penrith," said Michael, now outwardly calm again. "They must know something of it."

The men protested their innocence, yet it was evident they were holding something back, and I pressed them hard. At last Hardy, who had been touched in the forearm, told what he knew. It was little.

He and the three others, all chosen by Chantey-Sam for the trip ashore, had been out of favor ever since the raid by Funchal Pete for having sided against the capture of the ship and the marooning of Sir Richard and the rest of us. So Hardy insisted, with every show of honesty. Since then they had not been in the confidence of the rest. They admitted that Chantey-Sam had conceived some sort of plot and had purposely stayed aboard, but vowed that they had not been admitted to the councils.

Hardy indeed claimed that he had threatened to tell me of what was afoot and that Sam had placated them and sworn nothing was wrong, ending by picking them to go ashore as proof of his good intentions toward them.

Whether the tale was true or whether their part in it had been inspired by cowardice rather than fealty, it was hard to tell. It was all we could get out of them. Later they proved themselves. This much seemed certain, that the shots we had heard were not fired against the savages, but against fellow seamen, and those Michael's men. That Chantey-Sam, taking them by surprise, had captured the ship and secured the long-boat, leaving us ashore, hoping perhaps that the savages would surprise us—they must have heard our firing—and had made shift to sail the *Golden Hope* out of the bay.

It was Sir Richard's turn to be beside himself.

"Frank! They have taken Frank with them," he cried.

"They will not harm the lad," said Hardy.

"Why not?" I demanded, thinking I read some special meaning in his tone.

But I could get nothing more out of him save that Frank was a favorite with them, with which truth we had perforce to comfort ourselves.

Sooner or later the *Golden Hope* would come back to secure the treasure. We must hope to surprise them. Doubtless they would land in force. If we kept *perdu* and they believed us slain by the natives we might recapture the vessel—and Frank. It was a slender hope but it was all we had.

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And there was the schooner to reckon with. If she was after the treasure why did she stand out to sea?

"They might have stood in close and heard the firing also," suggested Sir Richard. "There is another landing marked on the map. Belike they chose that one. They may even have landed."

It was an enigma that we could not solve. All we could do was to wait for daylight. In the meantime I sent some men for wood and some for oysters that clung to the mangroves. They soon gathered a bountiful supply, despite the rising tide, and we broiled them in the ashes, feeling stronger for the meal.

I set short watches and we were about to try to get an hour or so of sleep against the perils of tomorrow when another ravel in the strange tangle presented itself. A boat was rowing up the inlet, two men at the oars, two in the stern, one supporting the other against his shoulder. Even at the distance and by the moonlight I thought I recognized the one who steered. So did Sir Richard. I heard an exclamation jump from his lips.

The boat came nearer, the rowers wearily dipping at their sculls, straight for the glow of the fire. It struck the shallows and glided up on the shingle. The men made no effort to get out, but sat with bowed heads, exhausted, like oarsmen at the end of a long race. The figure in the stern lowered the man beside him to the bottom of the boat and stood up, a long cloak falling about him. I could see his eyes flash as he hailed us.

"May I come ashore, Sir Richard?"

It was Simeon Levison.

CHAPTER XIX

SIMEON'S STORY

THE cool effrontery of the man was paralyzing. Later I set much of it down to bravery as I came to know more of the complex character of the man. Then I felt the stir of air as Sir Richard's arm shot up and down again, steadying a pistol. But before it had trained upon its mark Simeon's cloak opened and I saw the gleam of a pistol barrel.

"I am as good a shot as ye, Sir Richard," he said. "Tut, man, this is no time to fight a duel. There are two sides to your willingness to kill. Let me tell my tale first."

It seemed folly to shoot a man who must have much to inform us. The weariness of the rowers—the boat was meant for six oars at least—the wounded man, all spelled mystery. But I had no need to restrain Sir Richard who had mastered himself.

"Come ashore, Levison," he said. "We'll listen to what ye have to say."

The oarsmen had in a measure recovered and, with the aid of our men, the boat was dragged up the shingle after Simeon had landed. The wounded man was lifted out and set down by the fire. He was dressed in a captain's uniform and seemed close to death. One of the others was almost a youth, of the same race as Simeon, slim and tender-handed, the other a tarry seaman whose head was roughly bandaged. Simeon seemed to glance curiously at the lacings of my coat, but said nothing to me.

"Some water would be welcome to all of us," he said.

We brought them some from the creek. The man in the captain's uniform could not swallow. As I put the dipper to his lips his jaws fell and I laid him back on the sand.

Simeon saw my action and came swiftly over, kneeling by the side of the corpse.

"So, they killed you, Thompson? Another tally on the score."

He dropped the hand that he had held and stood up, a stern and dignified figure. There was a strength about him that I could not help but acknowledge, much as I instinctively disliked and mistrusted him. Indeed I never could justly find but one flaw in him, a weakness common enough to all of us—the love of gold and the power of it—intensified in his race, mayhap, by centuries of oppression.

"We will bury him presently. He was a gallant man and true," he said. "I see you have your own dead." He glanced to where the three bodies of Michael's mates lay, awaiting burial. "Now, Sir Richard, there is much ye may all care to hear and some for you in private."

"My men have mutinied. They took us unawares. One rogue among them spoiled the priming of our pistols. There were two main villains and one supreme fool—myself. These two were Simpkins and Fenton, both of whom ye knew."

He turned to include me in his talk addressed to Sir Richard.

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"They were but part of a triple combine that gulled both ye and me. The other was Sam Pike. Two of them Towne's men. But that is no news to ye. Enough that they succeeded. They have taken my ship and, I judge, yours. Doubtless by this they are in consort. Ye appear to be marooned. Me they cast adrift with my secretary here, one faithful sailor, who shall be rewarded, and Captain Thompson, who died in the discharge of duty.

"They made their capture last night. We four were locked in the main cabin where we had made a stand. This morning they started to land on the other side of the island. Fenton seemed to know the place well. I assumed they would join Sam Pike if he had succeeded in his aims, or help him to overcome ye, secure the treasure and, belike, leave us behind, cut our throats, or force us to walk the plank, all of which endings they discussed for our benefit.

"But, at the sound of firing on the land they sheered off and rounded the isle. We could guess only by sounds their actions, but it would seem they sighted your barkentine, exchanged signals, and, a while ago, they set us in the boat and told us to go where we or the devil pleased. I saw the reflection of your fire and we ventured to draw closer, holding in the shadow, until we were assured that ye were white men and not savages.

"I doubt not that they think we may furnish food for cannibal feasts or sacrifice and so be rid of us, after we have served them by lessening the numbers of the natives and making their own landing the easier when they come back for the treasure. But here—he counted us as we sat—here are thirteen of us, an unlucky number, they say, but 'tis one better than twelve and we may yet render good account of ourselves. I see ye are well armed. Where is the lad?"

"Aboard the ship," said Sir Richard. "He and Peter. Ye tell an interesting tale, Levison. Belike it is true. But one part of it I question. We, ye say. Dost think to throw in with us and claim share in the gold?"

"Why, that is a long stream to cross and no bridge yet in sight. But why not we?"

Michael led the rest in a growl and I silenced them.

"Why not? Zounds, Simeon! Because this is my venture. I purchased the map. These are my men, ten to the three of ye. We reached here despite all your crafty tricks. Reached here first. There are a few reasons for ye."

Menace was in the air. Had Simeon stirred or shown the least sign of uneasiness Michael and the rest would have been upon him. Already they reached for their weapons.

"One moment," said Levison. "That is a question to be settled between Sir Richard and myself. We will discuss it in private. I too have a map. We must compare them. The treasure is no man's, save his who finds it. As for the money that furnished the venture, that also is a matter for private talk. A word with ye, Sir Richard."

The two of them walked aside into the shadows beyond the fire and paced up and down at the foot of the cliff while the secretary and the seaman watched us and I watched Michael and his mates, chafing like hounds before the leash is thrown off. Presently they came back to us.

"I have made compact with Mr. Levison," said Sir Richard in a constrained voice. "He will stay with us. We need all the strength we can muster."

Across the inlet the sky was beginning to tremble toward the dawn that would soon spring up, full lit. I told off men to dig deep graves in the sand where we laid the dead men and covered the mounds with heavy boulders. As Sir Richard, Simeon and I turned from the melancholy duty Michael gave a sudden shout, fired his pistol and rushed for the mangroves.

There was a scuffle and he returned, bringing with him a frightened savage, blood trickling from his shoulder, his eyes rolling in the dawn. He was of a light copper color and clad in a scanty loin-cloth. One hand still held a bow and arrows. Michael spoke to him in his own tongue and, as he came on, handled him less roughly.

"A hostage," he said, as they reached us.

He made the man sit down on his haunches in the sand and kept talking to him, eliciting a few answers. Presently Michael took off the gold hoops that he always wore in his ears and gave them to the native who received them half fearfully, then with growing delight. Amber brought water at Michael's request and

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bathed the wound which was superficial, while the rest of us looked on in wonder.

" 'Twas surprise to me the way the natives acted," said Michael. "They are wont to be friendly. But, as I thought, the tribe has been abused and, if I mistake not, Sam Pike and belike this fellow Fenton, who, I guess is the liar I met at the Fouled Anchor—he looked at me and I nodded—are among those who started the trouble.

"There was a wreck here seven moons since, he tells me, and the tribe were kind to the crew and brought them to this island where they fed them and made much of them. Then they returned this kindness by abuse, took women by force and drove the rest off in canoes. Only part of the tribe were here, the main body was on a foray to the south. When they came back the men were gone, but the women's tales and what some of them had suffered roused them to reprisal on us.

"I have told him that we are the enemies of these men. They know the English. The chief has some words of our tongue. If we treat this fellow well they may parley with us. He was sent ahead to spy out our strength."

"Knows he aught of the treasure beneath the great stone?" asked Simeon.

Michael looked sourly at him, but put the question at Sir Richard's nod.

"He says it is a sacred stone, set up to their god Andriamanitra. He knows naught of anything buried beneath it. They hold it in reverence. Only the priests dare touch it, to annoint it."

I remembered Chantey-Sam's tales to young Frank of "The Perfumed One."

"A rare place to hide a treasure," said Simeon. "Towne was cunning to choose a sacred place."

"Give the lad some wine," said Sir Richard. "There is some left, I fancy."

There was part of a flagon. It was the best service that wine of Madeira gave us. Michael touched it first with his lips and then the savage drank, smacking his lips and rubbing his belly as it warmed him. We gave him a knife at which his eyes gleamed while he felt its keen edge and then Michael harangued him once more and sent him on his way.

We watched him as he dived into the mangrove thicket.

"A good turn, Michael," said Sir Richard. "Where learned ye to speak their lingo?"

"I am a buccaneer," said Michael. "I sling a score of lingoes. I learned it long ago at Maritan. Their tongue is close to that of the South Seas."

"Maritan?" said Simeon. "Isaac, what of Maritan?"

The young secretary spoke for the first time since landing.

"I heard the men aboard, after they captured us, speak of Maritan. I think 'tis there they mean to rendezvous."

"I know every foot of the place," cried Michael. " 'Tis likely enough. 'Tis a favorite place for those 'on the account.' Misson was there with Teague, they say. And Bowen, too. There may be other freebooters there now, or not. 'Tis near the East Cape. Now, with this long-boat, or mayhap some canoes from the natives to mask our approach the better, we can reach them. They will careen to cleanse the bottoms and stay ashore to loaf and feast with native wives. We can trap them yet, eh Amber? Wells shall yet rest easy in his grave, he and the rest of our mates."

"Ye have forgotten, Michael," I said, "that they will probably be back after the treasure when they have given us a day or so to be killed."

He looked at me chopfallen.

"I had forgotten," he said. "I thought not of gold, but of the mates who sailed with us."

I believed him and thought the better of him from that on.

" 'Tis all one," he muttered, "so we come to reach of them."

Some of the men had been scouting for breakfast and came back with fish found in pools, crabs and shell fish, and we cooked them while we waited for the success of our embassy. The sun was two hours high when we heard a shout and saw our friendly native returning, all smiles. Behind him, emerging from the mangroves, was a group of islanders, led by two tall men wearing broad-brimmed hats of woven grass and, over their brown skins, squares of fine cloth, elaborately ornamented and shining like silk. They held up their arms in amicable greeting as they came and one bore a palm branch.

"Toriki (welcome)," said one of them. "You English? Me —— good fren'."

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CHAPTER XX

THE OATH OF BROTHERHOOD

OUR new-found allies—for such they promised to be—escorted us along the stream for a short distance and then struck for the uplands by a side cleft so heavily masked with shrubbery as to have passed unnoticed by us. Presently we reached the wooded highlands and passed through the forest by a well-beaten path that gradually ascended until we came out upon the flanks of a small hill, or crater cone, a part of the central core that was named Mount Towne upon the map.

This cone was thick-set with verdure, coco-palms waved in ordered rows and here and there were plantations of maize and manioc, sweet potatoes and yams, with fields of rice growing in water confined by dikes in a little valley between the cone and the mountain proper. Here too cattle grazed. The community was evidently both populous and prosperous.

Toward the summit, where we could see houses set within a palisade, we crossed a series of deep *fosses*, each ditch encircling the hill and making a line of strong defense.

The tribe, Michael told us, was of the *Antankarana*, and the two chiefs of the royal blood of the *Andriana*, descended from Arab lineage, which accounted for their light color. There were many black men in the tribe, at work in the plantations. These were *Andevos*, slaves from Africa, brought to Madagascar by the Moors and sold for gold and precious stones.

Many of the women, who welcomed us with a chant, were straight-nosed, thin-lipped and handsome, with sparkling eyes and erect carriage.

All these were clad in a species of apron reaching to the knees, called a *kitambi*, above which they wore a short jacket of silken cloth, and all the men of the tribe proper wore the *lamba* or *toga*-like mantle. As for ornaments, they were many and wrought with surprising skill from gold and silver in long chains and brooches of filigree work.

A feast was being cooked for the occasion and the smell of roasting bullocks, the savory odors from certain pots above the fires and the contents of baking pits dug in the ground and covered with leaves, sent up a grateful incense and set our mouths to watering. They served us first with *toke*—the wine of the country, made from palms, stronger than any of Sir Richard's vintages—and with the effervescing juice of young coconuts.

What with the halting English of the two chiefs, who seemed to divide authority in the little kingdom with the high-priest, who did not appear for the feast—being engaged in divination, we were told—and the interpretation of Michael, the tale of the man we had seized for a messenger was confirmed.

Evidently Sam Pike and Fenton had lied, or partly lied, about their sojourn on the island. Towne's men had behaved treacherously toward their native hosts. The daughter of one of the chiefs, named Mushmango, had been taken by Towne and had afterward killed herself for her defilement.

It would have seemed to always be the policy of the buccaneers who visited Madagascar to keep faith with the natives, not only for their own safety, but for the better securing of provisions and help in building their settlements and refitting their vessels. Towne's men had been the first to break this friendship and the chiefs were bitter.

Mushmango appeared to take a special fancy to me and talked long through Michael, looking me earnestly in the eyes the while. The other chieftain talked with Sir Richard and Simeon. At last Mushmango rose and gave orders for the feast to be served.

"He says it is well," said Michael. "That you have the clear eye of truth and that he believes you. Once they have eaten with us—according to the fashion of the Arabs—they will be our friends. If the priest finds the signs favorable they will join with us in regaining the ships."

After we had eaten to repletion, urged by our friendly hosts, the priest came out of his dwelling. The houses of the chiefs were of solid timbers, high pitched with thatch. Many of the rest were of sun-baked brick and the priest's was one of these, differing from the rest in that the low door faced the east and, in the bricks before they fairly dried, innumerable shells had been stuck, gleaming with mother-of-pearl, together with human bones, dried star-fishes and other strange sea creatures with heads like miniature horses.

He stalked out with eyes that seemed in a trance. In one hand he bore a calabash

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filled with a steaming fluid. This he poured out on the ground and I saw that it was blood. It spattered here and there on the hard dirt and he squatted over it, marking the direction of the clots and their number, muttering the while invocations wherein I caught the frequent mention of Andrimanitra and Zanahari, the names spoken with an uptossing of his arms.

At last he turned toward us and spoke in a voice broken with age and muddled by his toothless jaws. He was very old, seamed like a wood-lizard, and his eyes were red-hawed like a mastiff's. They reminded me of Don, left on board with Frank Madden for fear of his ruff and long coat in the jungle.

Human teeth hung about his neck in long strings and his arms and legs clanked with rings of gold and silver wire. Beyond these he was stark naked save for a narrow strip of scarlet cloth.

"White men are here," he quavered, Michael translating. "They are our brothers, for we too are white and not as the *Andevos*, who are our slaves. They have lost and ask us to help them gain. What they have lost they shall get again, what they have sought they shall find, though not in such fashion as they imagine. Zanahari (the Creator) and Andriamanitra have spoken in their favor. But let them see to it that they profane not their shrines!"

AS HE ceased the people shouted and the chiefs turned to us with every manifestation of delight. But there was a thorn to that rose. The oracle was favorable, but the profanation of the shrine was another matter that stood between us and the treasure. Still, there was time enough for that. The present purpose must be to cement our friendship.

Mushmango rose and made a speech that ended in all the Andrianans turning toward us with smiles and nods of approval. I looked to Michael.

"They want to swear amity with ye and Sir Richard," he said. "There will be a ceremony to go through wherein ye drink each other's blood. Not more than a pint of each," he added with a grin. "But it means an oath inviolable to them."

"Why not with Simeon?" I asked him under my breath.

"They have learned to mistrust his race through the Moors," he said.

Sir Richard acquiesced when he learned of the intent. Indeed there was nothing else to do since refusal would mean insult. Then Simeon did a strange thing.

He rose and walked over to Mushmango, pronouncing some words I could not catch and made a swift motion with his hands. To this Mushmango started back in astonishment and then slowly advanced his hand. They exchanged a grip and Simeon stooped and quickly drew some figures in the dust in such a way that they were hidden to the rest of us. Mushmango called his brother chieftain and they both gazed in awe upon the cabalistic signs and on Simeon who smiled and wiped out the drawings with his foot. The chiefs made obeisance to him and he received their homage proudly, returning to his seat.

Then our ceremonial started. The four of us, I with Mushmango, Sir Richard with the other chief, sat opposite and very close to each other; after we had taken off our shoes and hose and interwove fingers and toes. With Michael interpreting, we made oath to do each other all friendly offices, to be a friend or enemy to the friend or enemy of each other. If we falsified this oath we expressed the wish that we might be devoured by the alligator, fall by the lance or be struck dead by the hand of Zanahari.

The priest came forward and scarified the four of us on the chests with his knife, mopping up the starting blood with a piece of maize bread. This he distributed so that each ate the blood of the other contracting party. It was a messy undertaking, but we carried it through with all solemnity and the priest pronounced us flesh and blood of blood, brothers in equality and wish.

But Simeon was greater than all of us, it seemed. The priest took him into the sacred hut and presently came out behind him, treating him with a respect that held great effect among the natives.

"What are they?" asked Sir Richard, who was affected by the *toke* he had drunk too freely of and forgot his courtesy. "Are the Andrianans one of the lost tribes?"

"I know not," answered Simeon. "But there are brotherhoods that weld all creeds. Certain things their chiefs have learned from the Arabs, who share with my race the truths of an order known around the world, where Zanahari and Mohammed,

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Jehovah and Jove, Shing-to and Buddha of the far Orient are but manifestations of the Supreme. I know the ritual and, in the order, I am farther advanced than Mushmango, or the priest. They will obey me in many things."

I knew that he spoke of the order of the Masons—so called. My scholarship had taught me that, in somewhat varying ritual, its influence was known about the globe and its members bound by its ancient ties. It made Simeon a bigger man than any of us, it was an inkling to the somewhat condescending wisdom that showed in his eyes at times.

"Mayhap your influence may offset their strictures as to the profanation of the Sacred Stone?" suggested Sir Richard, with a tinge of satire.

"Mayhap it will," answered Simeon quietly. "I have thought of that. I believe I can compass it."

That outlook put a different complexion upon the sharing of the trove. Simeon seemed to hold the present key to its removal.

At Mushmango's order a watch had been set far up the mountain for the approach of the *Golden Hope* or the *Falcon*, and, meanwhile, we laid our plans. The defense of the village was perfect. Our line of retreat was assured. In the woods and from ambush the darts and arrows and long lances of the tribe, all tipped with iron wrought by themselves, would be more than a match for the superior numbers of the pirates.

Michael expressed contempt of Fenton as a leader. Sam Pike he avowed a coward. Simpkins was an unknown quantity, but it seemed absurd that the tavern-keeper could show any of the qualities that made a general of forces. Michael, I fancied, would be a match for the three of them together either at brains or muscles. And Fenton, according to Simeon, was the ringleader.

Sir Richard and I did not discuss with Simeon the matter of the crew leaving the *Golden Hope* at Plymouth. It was evident that they had done so on Simeon's command and that Fenton had deliberately plotted with Simpkins to sell the secret to Simeon and had joined the *Falcon* after he had given us the slip and believed us left shorthanded at Plymouth Cutwater.

One thing I did not see present solution of, the taking-in of Simpkins by Pike and Fenton, save as rogues drift together. But I learned that later. I still had my own score to talk over with Simeon, remembering the chute, but it was plausible that he knew nothing of Simpkins' methods, or he would make it so, and meanwhile, as I have said, he was the chief among us from the standpoint of our very necessary allies.

The day wore on and no word came from the sentinel on the mountain. Once more we ate and then I set watches. Fenton and Pike at least would know of the islanders' antipathy to darkness and they might make their raid toward midnight, or a little later, when the tide served.

Two men went to either landing with orders to fire their muskets at the first sign of attack, and Sir Richard, Simeon and I divided the hours between us in awaiting the signal.

But the clear night passed to a cloudless dawn and there was no sign of either barkentine or schooner.

Simeon spent much of the morning with the priest, while Sir Richard and I talked with the chieftains and completed various theories of attack and defense. Toward noon Simeon came to us and we three set out with chiefs and priest toward the clearing where we had been attacked.

The object of our journey was the Sacred Stone. It was a pillar of gray lava smeared and stained with the greasy anointing of blood and fat, while about its base the bones of the victims were piled high. I saw skulls and ribs and thigh bones of cattle and goats, but none of any human sacrifice. We had left Michael behind, but managed to converse fairly well in broken English.

MUSHMANGO pointed out with indignation some graving on the monolith. We three whites looked at it with indrawn breath. To the natives it was utter profanation, to us it was tangible evidence that Towne had been there and for some reason had left his mark upon the pillar. There could be but one reason to our minds, the burying of the treasure.

Deeply chiseled in the porous stone showed a "T" above the carving of a skeleton head and crossed bones. It was the Sign of the Skull, the signet of the freebooters. And, underneath those piled up

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bones, or close thereby, lay the chest I had seen in my vision, whose forced lid unloosed a glare of gold and a blaze of shimmering gems.

I looked at Sir Richard and saw the greed glaze in his eyes. My own heart was pounding and I found my fingers sinking into my palms in an anticipatory clutch. As for Simeon, his nostrils were dilated and a red spot glowed through the tan of his cheeks. His eyes glittered and his curving nose seemed to my fancy like the beak of a vulture. The man's inner nature, or a ruling component of it, was signaled in his face and attitude. Greed of gold! It held us all in its thrall. Even the natives sensed it, Mushmango and his brother chief looking on with mild amazement while the wrinkled countenance of the priest held undisguised contempt.

Mushmango touched the golden ornaments he wore and pointed to the ground. I nodded. He shrugged his shoulders, picked up some dirt, rubbed it and let it fall, then touched his ornaments again. To him gold was but yellow earth, too soft for weapons, valued only for its hue and contrast with his own skin. Simeon in turn touched the chief's bracelets.

"*Unga?*" he asked.

We had already picked up a few words, and this one meant "plenty" or "much."

Mushmonga shook his head.

"*Ore unga*" (not much).

But there was much beneath our feet, enough to make rich men of all, according to the talk of Fenton and Pike and the general rumor regarding Towne's treasure. Only a superstition lay between us and wealth. For a moment we all looked at the islanders with the thought of murder that seems ever allied with the precious mineral. The priest looked back at us serenely, conscious of the upper hand.

Simeon sighed and broke the spell. We might win to it yet through his Masonic potency. It seemed incredible that we should journey so far and return empty-handed after all. On our way back Simeon walked with knitted brows, revolving plans, no doubt, to overcome the prejudices of the Andrianans.

At the foot of the hill Michael met us with Amber, his eyes glowing.

"They are in sight!" he cried. "Quick, to the summit!"

We raced after him and found the rest of our men with the natives gazing out to sea. Less than a league away, a tall ship, smothered in canvas, the wind abeam, heeling over, sped to the north. Behind it, like hounds in chase of the sighted quarry, the foam at their bows as slaver in their jaws, raced the *Falcon* and the *Golden Hope*. The schooner seemed creeping up upon the chase, the barkentine hard put to it to hold the pace and gradually falling behind like some clumsier bulldog hunting with a greyhound.

There came a puff of smoke from the bows of the schooner. We could see the shot hit and skip the sea, plunging at last short of the chase. Then the sullen boom of the Long Tom floated up to us. The chase replied from her stern, but all were out of range.

"Wasting good powder," growled Michael. "The fools 'll never overhaul her 'less they flatten sheets. Look at the lubbers on the *Hope*."

The barkentine was a badly handled ship. Clumsier-hulled than either schooner or the leading vessel, a brig; her canvas was badly set, her yards uneven and slack to the wind. But she held doggedly on to aid her speedier consort after the latter had engaged. The brig was crowded to skysails and made a good run for it.

"One of the Moorish fleet," said Michael, longingly. "With good booty aboard. Gold-dust and diamonds and rich carpets. And we stand here like penned chickens watching them bungle it."

"I thought ye had quit pirating, Michael," I rallied.

"A Moor is fair prize to all. They carry on the slave trade with the Arabs and that gives warranty for attack. 'Tis no piracy. Blood and wounds, Mr. Penrith, you would not deny so fair a chance if we had run across it?"

His widespread nostrils seemed to smell the powder that was being burned as the white puffs showed. The schooner barely held her own.

"No wonder they left the treasure for the time with another prize so handy," said Sir Richard.

"Aye, and there'll be more than the one ship along presently for them to pick if they are smart enough," grumbled Michael. "Eh, lad, but that was a shrewd shot."

They had raised the elevation of the schooner's bow-gun and a round shot had

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plumped into the mizzen of the brig, striking the mast at the royal and bringing down the topsail-hamper on the run. The brig returned the fire and we saw a swarm of men clambering to cut free the wreckage. But she lessened speed and the *Falcon* crawled closer.

"Yaw, and give them a broadside!" cried Michael. "Eh, there go more splinters!"

His sympathies seemed equally divided between his hatred of the men aboard the *Falcon* and the *Golden Hope* and his natural instincts of buccaneering. The Moorish vessel seemed to have caught his suggestion, for she yawed and, as the schooner shot up into the wind to offset the maneuver, fired a broadside. A jib-stay on the schooner was sundered and the jib fluttered down but a clever shot from her bows fairly entered the stern of the brig and she resumed her course, fleeing as best she could with the twain hanging to her flanks.

They were fast diminishing. The sound of the cannon grew fainter, the puffs of smoke, growing more frequent as the chase closed, faded to mere flecks. One by one their hulls dropped, the *Golden Hope* far behind. First the pyramidal canvas of the brig disappeared below the horizon, close followed by the topsails of the *Falcon*, the *Golden Hope's* sails last to drop, and we strained our ears to catch the last pattering of the carronade.

"A lot of swabs," said Michael. "Give me my own ten men again and a deck to stand on and I'd not run from such vermin. I'd wait for 'em, with all their metal, and chase them off their own decks with the flat of a cutlas."

CHAPTER XXI

MARITAN

FOR two days we stayed upon the hill-top, consumed with impatience and craving for action. Of the result of the chase we could not even guess. The Moorish brig might have shaken off her pursuers or, by some turn of chance, destroyed them. We had seen no sign of the return of *Golden Hope* nor *Falcon*, but they might easily have passed in the night or out of sight of land. And in the meanwhile we got no closer to the treasure.

In this matter there were signs of vigilance upon the part of the priest, lest we forget our duties as guests and members of blood-brotherhood, and make some attempt by stealth to secure the hidden loot. Simeon, bound by no ceremonial and, in a way, a chieftain over their own chiefs, they appeared to suspect none the less. We never left the confines of the village without being conscious that our steps were dogged and our actions overlooked.

Simeon had great hopes of overcoming the obstacle. The Andrianans were an offshoot of the powerful Betsimaraka tribe which ruled the country about Maritan. The king's name was Dempaino, and Michael had met him. He was a powerful ruler over many petty princes and well disposed to all white men.

As the uncle of Mushmango he might be expected to espouse the latter's cause which was now linked with our own. He was dominant enough to be lord over the high priest of his tribe—Mananbolo—and, if Simeon could gain the king's ear, it seemed likely that some dispensation might be made in our favor.

Gold and silver, we learned, were scattered throughout the big isle and its groups, but only acquired by much toil. Mushmango showed us calabashes of crude gems and gave us many, some of which turned out quite valuable after cutting. These were rubies and sapphires, beryl, topaz and garnet, but the gathering of a fortune from these meant a long sojourn and much travel and labor with but doubtful results. Meanwhile, literally at our feet, there lay Towne's treasure, certified by his seal and initial, attested by the two maps.

The charts of Sir Richard and Simeon were identical. Since they had permitted us to keep the originals, doubtless Fenton and Pike had copies, but either they thought us perished in our first encounter with the Andrianans and took their time about a certainty, or they had, which was more likely, game in the hand which was worth two in the bush.

On the third day after the sea-fight we had witnessed, Mushmango inquired whether we were still disposed to attempt recovery of our ships. If so, he was ready to join us, and the priest had proclaimed the omens auspicious. Moreover he declared that if we waited for another twenty-four hours he would discover their whereabouts.

This seemed nothing short of actual

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wizardry. Michael declared that the tribes had mysterious means of swift communication, but we never found out the method. The sea was dotted with islets scattered beyond apparent sight or sound. The reverberations of a hollow log, suspended between creeping vines and swiftly smitten, had something to do with the sending and reply, so did certain smokes sent up from the summit of the mountain and carried perhaps from peak to peak and on again by canoes.

Whatever the mode, the priest bore back the answer within the allotted time that the pirates—for thus we now styled them—had captured the Moorish brig and now lay in wait for other prizes in an inlet close to Maritan.

There was great preparation when we decided to accept the news. We were weary of suspense, and Mushmango proposed to leave sufficient guard to hold his island, which meant also the treasure, though of this we did not speak. Michael was beside himself in the prospect of revenge. There should be some seventy of the pirates aboard both ships, not counting definitely upon how many had been slain in the attack on the brig or in the fight with Michael's bullies.

Sir Richard, as myself, felt we should make some instant effort to rescue Frank. Michael believed that they had adopted the lad as a lucky-fellow, but the lad must be tortured with uncertainty regarding our fates as we with him—though I did not share entirely Sir Richard's opinion on this count—and so we made ready.

We took the long-boat for our own accommodation, designing to beach it when we neared Maritan and take to canoes as less liable to excite suspicion or rumor of our coming. Mushmango furnished six big canoes, each holding a score of warriors, among them certain of the black slaves whose stalwart frames and eagerness to acquit themselves well and so acquire their freedom, promised well for fighting men.

They were only armed with their savage weapons, poor enough against powder and shot, but we anticipated using strategy to combat superior force and at last the flotilla got under way. We hoisted a lug-sail and the canoes mounted finely woven mats that held the breeze. Provisions were piled aboard, and, the long-boat in the lead, we started for the mainland of Madagascar, I as navigator once more with my compass, of the use of which the chiefs were aware.

Mushmango and his brother chief were given pistols. Each had a magnificent curved sword, of Arabian make, keen enough to sever a hair. The priest stayed behind to guard his Sacred Stone with a hundred of the second rank warriors.

On the third morning we sighted Cape Ambro. There Mushmango landed to bring back news that the two ships were still at anchor and the men carousing after their recent capture. Better than this, we learned that they were out of favor with the king of the Betsimarakans for having insisted on certain women of high rank being given to them for wives. No other buccaneers were at Maritan.

I had hourly feared that we might meet the ships at sea on a fresh raid, or at the least find them absent from Maritan. Now we pressed on, with oars and paddles plied briskly when the wind was unfavorable, sweeping down the coast close to the barrier reef.

Ten miles above the Bay of Maritan we landed, leaving the canoes with some friendly Betsimarakans, and finishing our journey afoot through the forest, following beaten paths. This last stage was by night, the Andrianans in the lead, swinging along with eyes that saw like cats in the dark. Twice we heard the thrum of drums. The word had long since passed of our expedition, and already a messenger had come back from Dempaino assuring us of his protection and aid.

We lingered in the edge of the jungle at dawn, looking down upon the wide stream of a river that flowed quietly to the sea. On the farther bank was a log building within a palisade, and close to it a settlement of log houses apparently deserted; once, said Michael, the colony of the famous freebooters Misson and Teague and, later, Bowen. From the enclosed building came chimney smoke. In the river was moored the schooner. The barkentine was gone.

Michael was all for a rush, but Mushmango counseled our first seeing the king for policy's sake. It was hard work to restrain ourselves, but we ascended the river and came to Dempaino's city. Mushmango was first admitted to audience and then we were summoned before the king. He received us under his sign of rank, a

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scarlet umbrella; a stout man, swollen by reckless living, with puffed features, who greeted us with cordiality, but could, I fancied, be cruel enough at times.

He had small use for Sir Richard and myself. Simeon, with his Masonry, was to him the leader. But he feasted us and gave us fifty of his men to augment our forces. These were the more welcome since they carried muskets, many of them fusils sadly out of date, but still effective.

WE CROSSED the river just before noon, terribly hot as it was, hoping to catch the pirates dozing. The *Golden Hope* had gone out the afternoon before in search of a Moorish vessel said to be sailing up the coast. The schooner's rudder had been damaged in the fight with the first brig and she was left behind for repairs at which the king's men had worked under the direction of the pirates. Most of these had gone in the barkentine. So far as we could find, neither Pike, nor Fenton, nor Simpkins were among those left behind.

There was little fight and less glory to this essay. A hundred savages creeping through the tall grasses unseen, unheard, a hundred naked forms clambering over the stockade with a concerted yell, clouds of darts and arrows, a leaping down as a few shots were fired, the thrusting of lances, and, before we ourselves could take a hand, the carnage was over, and a dozen mutineers lay asprawl, sliced and slashed, bristling with darts like so many porcupines until the natives retrieved their weapons from the still quivering flesh.

Four of them I recognized as men of the *Golden Hope*, eight Simeon tallied as members of the *Falcon's* complement. There were two more aboard the schooner who fled the ship at the first hideous yell after severing her moorings. We caught her before she drifted far, and, oh, but it was good to set foot on a deck again. She was filthy from the men's carousals, slatternly from their handling of the gear, but she was ours, and as we finished the repairing of the rudder we soon got her in shape again.

"You will take charge of the schooner, Mr. Penrith?" asked Simeon. "You can handle her better than I."

Sir Richard's eyes clouded. He was in no humor to see another usurp even temporary leadership. He had drunk deeply of the *toke* provided by the king, and he went below in surly humor enough.

We dropped down the river to the sea close to dusk and cleared the bar. A brisk wind blew. I gave the command to hoist sail and Michael and the seven seamen, those from the *Golden Hope* as hearty as the rest, remembering Pike's treachery toward them, jumped to the work, the black Andevos tailing to the sheets and halyards so that the canvas seemed to unfold upon her like the petals of a flower. Staysails and jibs, topsails and fore and main without a reef, and we danced along the crisp off-shore waves.

She was a beauty, was the *Falcon*. Stately as a swan, swift as her namesake. I took the helm from Michael for the sheer delight of handling her. The wind was abaft the beam and we reached gallantly. She quivered at the touch of helm like a stallion to the spur and to every puff of the wind responded with a bow and surged into it. Only the great west wind that had blown the *Golden Hope* across the longitudes could ever have enabled us to catch and pass her. On even terms she could have given the barkentine a league in five and left the *Golden Hope* wallowing in her wake.

"The fastest craft on the seas," said Michael, "and the sweetest. Watch the beauty walk!"

She did not walk, she ran, and leaped from crest to crest, every inch of canvas doing its duty. It was a dark night, save for the stars, but we carried no lights. The line of the reef glowed phosphorescent as we skirted it with the wind off-shore and then tacked seaward and back again on long legs, scouting even in the night, our blood racing to our tingling finger-tips, the decks a-bristle with men, dull flecks of polished iron weapon-tips just showing and a babble of soft linguals flowing as the natives chattered, keen as ourselves for encounter.

"A fine ship, Mr. Levison," I said, prone to share my enthusiasm with any one.

"Yet you beat her," he answered.

Sir Richard sulked in his cabin. Mushmango and the other Andrianan chief were with him for a while, but soon they came on deck and grouped aft with Simeon, Michael and myself, listening to the swish of the breeze in the cordage, the chatter of the unseen men, the rush of the wash

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and the almost living feel of the fast schooner under us.

Day came and still we zigzagged back and forth like a dog that noses a doubling track. The wind held and we sailed fast. Eleven knots and better she did, hour after hour. The sun crept down toward the mountain range and dusk began to gather on the eastern horizon, a purple haze, thin and streaky.

It was Michael who first saw it. A point of flame that broke through the murk and throbbed and faded and glowed more fiercely.

"A ship afire!" he cried. "Blood and fury, there's the barkentine!"

She was heading toward us, emerging from the mists. She had run down her prey and fired her, but she had suffered in the struggle. Through the glass we could see sails half unfurled where the partridge shot had cut clews and gaskets. As she came closer we could see the shot-holes in her main canvas. At her truck floated the black flag.

"They come to meet us, the gulls," said Michael. "They think we have come out to escort them in."

"We have," I said. "Michael, we whites will have to tend the guns. I'll take the wheel. We'll open as soon as we have the range and then board her. We can not risk their musket fire.

"Aye, board her, that's the trick. I'll hull her, but I'll not sink her. Hand-to-hand's the word. We'll drive them to the sharks."

"Are the carronades loaded?" I asked.

"Canister and partridge to pepper 'em. The chasers double-shotted. Amber, tell off some of those dusky rogues to handle powder and shot. See that the ports are clear to swing!"

I turned to Mushmango.

"Order your men to keep well out of sight," I said. "Our muskets are few. We are to board them and we shall not fire till every shot counts. Till then let them think us their own men."

He was leaning on his unscabbarded sword, the lust of fight on his face.

"All right, yes," he answered from his scanty English, and gave the low command.

Sir Richard came up. Plainly he had brought some native liquor aboard or found some private store in the cabin.

"In sight, are they?" he almost hiccuped.

"We'll be in touch of them within an hour, Sir Richard," I said. "I'll call ye when 'tis time."

"What's that. Ye'll call me? Dost think I'm drunk? Wouldst cheat me of the fight? My nephew's a prisoner on that ship, sir. I'll be first man aboard her."

There was no use gainsaying him in that mood. I had elected to take the wheel and I had scant time to spare. Simeon coaxed him below.

On came the barkentine, the black flag flapping at her masthead, and the *Falcon* sailed over the sunset seas to meet her.

CHAPTER XXII

BOARDERS AWAY!

MICHAEL came aft to report. He had tied a garish handkerchief high on his neck that covered his beard, lest those aboard the barkentine might wonder if they caught sight of it. Another covered his scalp, earrings swung in his ears, his hooked nose jutted out with a fierceness that suggested that it could actually rip and tear. His corded arms were bare, a cutlas swanked at his thigh. In his belt, between the leather and the silken scarf, were stuck a small arsenal of knives and pistols.

Not content with these, he carried other pistols at the ends of slings across his shoulders. His eyes shone with a glow all their own, the man was spoiling for a fight. He was the ideal free-fighter of the seas. It was no wonder, I thought, that Davis had pounded the heavy Spanish ships for seven days and nights and won at last with such bullies as these behind him.

Here was the type that had crystallized from Britain's crucible, Roman and Norman and Saxon, blended into the homogeny that would carry the Standard of the Lion across seas and deserts, and, once planting it, keep it there for aye. He was the true fighter, fearless bulldog that never knew defeat because the question of surrender never occurred to him while strength and consciousness remained. I trusted that the same gameness cored my own being as I looked at him, eager, confident and competent.

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"We must deceive them till the last moment, Michael," I said. "They have nine guns in either broadside to our five. Their carronades are heavier and their Long Toms the same. Make all the men, save our own, who may pass for a while as their own comrades, lie close under the rail. The first glimpse they catch of armed natives and they'll open on us. Their freeboard gives them the advantage."

Indeed, in many ways they had the better of us. They were double-decked to begin with and their guns would be served behind the cover of deck and side planking. There should be nearly sixty of them. The men of the *Falcon*, if they had shipped according to Simpkins' instructions to Carter, would be "good at haul-rope or outcutlas." From their superior height they could sweep our decks with partridge and musketry while the very numbers of our coppery allies made them a mark for slaughter.

"They have their boarding-nettings up," growled Michael.

"We'll not need ours," I answered. "We must not let them touch our decks."

"Aye, 'twill be short and sharp. 'Twill have to be. Look at the sun and—him."

He lowered his voice as he indicated Mushmango who was gazing at the sinking sun, ominously close to the ridge of the mountain chain.

"If the fight goes hard, they'll run with darkness," said Michael. "They fight like pit devils while day lasts, but they claim that the soul that is snuffed out after dark, without priest to protect with his spells, is grabbed by the demons of the night."

"There'll be an hour of daylight yet," I said. "The twilight will hold since the sun is not setting in the sea."

" 'Twill serve," said Michael. "I wonder if these Andrianans can throw straight. There is none too much powder in the magazine, nor shot, but there is a great store of *grenadoes*."

"Hand them out," I ordered. "Warn them as to the fuses. They'll need linstocks, but caution them not to expose them. Canst read those signals?"

The barkentine was less than half a mile away. The wind was dropping with the sun, to our benefit, as the *Falcon* thrived on light airs and the *Golden Hope*, as I knew full well, did not. She fired a gun to windward and there was a flutter of flags at her main truck — a signal of some kind.

"Not I," said Michael, with an oath. " 'Tis a private code."

"Answer with a gun," I said. "We'll have to engage since we can't answer the bunting."

Along the rails, like herrings in a barrel, the natives twined their bodies. The nearly level rays of the sun caught their rolling eyeballs and prophetically stained their weapon-tips blood red.

Simeon and Sir Richard came on deck at the sound of the guns. Mushmango was hunkered on the deck beside the wheel, running his fingers lightly along the edge of his simitar. The other chief was forward with the natives. The guns were manned. I caught the glows from cautiously puffed tow in the linstocks. Slowly we covered the distance between us.

A group of men were clustered on the poop of the barkentine. One of them took up a trumpet.

"Ahoy there, the *Falcon!*" he shouted. "Why don't ye answer signals?"

Between decks her ports lifted and the grim muzzles peeped out. Concealment was no longer possible.

"Answer them, Michael," I ordered, "and then fire."

The buccaneer, disdaining my speaking trumpet, cupped his hands and roared across the water the rallying cry of the freebooters.

"From the Seas!"

He leaped forward, shouting the command to fire.

"Elevate, Amber! Rake their decks! —— their eyes, let 'em have it!"

We were on the starboard tack, and, at the word, the schooner shook with the explosion of our port broadside. Through the dense, sulfurous smoke that rolled between us I saw the flashes of the answering guns. A round shot plowed a swath across our decks and reaped a bloody harvest from the Andrianans, who had jumped to their feet, sounding a shrill yell of defiance.

"Keep down, men," I shouted. "Now, Michael, over with her. Hard alee!"

I had gaged the distance and we shot up into the wind and crossed the clumsy bows of the *Golden Hope*—for once, I had occasion to be thankful for them—giving her our starboard broadside as we tacked once more and glided by her. What with

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her impetus and our own she did not blanket us from the wind while the thick, heavy smoke of the discharge had so masked our maneuver that her belated broadside did us little damage.

Astern of her we once more came about as the rim of the sun just touched the summit of the range. Michael's bow gun sent its iron hail into her counter, the shot plowing upward through the deck and barely missing the wheel. As we threw free our sheets and came on full-winged to catch and board her, the barkentine's stern-chaser roared.

They had loaded with canister and the missiles fairly sprayed our decks, riddling the foresail and splintering through the mast, sending a dozen natives gasping to the planks. The pirates worked furiously to reload before we could gain the brief protection of her high stern, but we passed by in safety and flung our grappling-hooks high to her rail.

They caught in her open ports, the boarding-netting and her rigging, the two hulls ground and bumped and we tossed a shower of grenades upon her deck and jumped to board her, as her broadside, with the carronades depressed, belched. The heavy shot crashed through deck and hull. One tore through the already tottering foremast and it fell. The *Falcon* had clutched, but it was her last fight. The water poured in and the natives serving from the magazine rushed on deck.

"Boarders away!"

I HEARD the clarion call of Michael as we scrambled pell-mell aboard the barkentine, clinging to the meshes of the boarding-netting, thrust at by pikes with muskets and pistols firing point-blank in our faces in a few mad moments of utter confusion.

The man who can describe a fight like ours in detail is apt not to have been in the thick of it. I remember Sir Richard raving at my side as we swarmed the netting. I remember the strong reek of liquor on his breath and how he staggered when he jumped to the deck and rushed into the mêlée. I saw, too, Michael firing his last pistol and throwing it into the face of an opponent while his cutlas whirled up and down again.

The smoke wreathed about us and the dusk deepened as we fought in a medley of savage yells and deep-sea shouting. Once Simeon's face showed vaguely, tight-lipped, serene, his eyes shining. Beside him was his slender secretary.

I fired my brace of pistols into the ruck of the pirates that opposed us, not knowing what damage I did before they were on us and every man was fighting hand to hand. Amber was beside me. He had discarded cutlas for a curving knife, half as long as my sword, with which he did mighty work in that close-range encounter. My own sword was buried in the ribs of a fierce-visaged ruffian, and, as he fell, was well-nigh twisted from my hand.

Out of the tail of my eye I saw the up-sweep of a broadax while I tugged to disengage my blade. Amber's left hand shot out, a hairy snake. It caught the pirate's descending wrist, and, in a trice, his right had ripped the other's stomach as one might gut a herring. The man fell with a shriek. His dying clutch gripped at my ankles and I kicked loose. Ahead of me was Simeon, cool as a fencing-master, as his man dropped before him.

Soon the pistols were all discharged and there was no time for reloading. It was cold steel—that soon was smoking warm. The Andrianans and the king's men plied dart and lance with savage yells and slowly we drove the pirates back to the break of the poop and chased some up the ladder to the poop itself.

There once more I saw Michael, roaring like a bull as he charged. A man backed from him and sought to hide himself behind two of his comrades. Michael's cutlas split open the skull of one. I saw the head divide like a ripe melon as I passed, intent upon reaching Sir Richard who was hard put to it, and I glimpsed, even in my haste, that the skulker was Sam Pike.

The deck was slippery with blood. Sir Richard's sword was shattered to a few inches and his face was wan and gray in the increasing twilight. The false strength of the liquor had departed and left his arm weak and his eye uncertain. Even as I reached his side he slipped and the pirate reached him with a dirk. Sir Richard sank to the deck and I lunged and caught his conqueror under his upraised arm, close to the armpit.

There was a shout and a yell behind me and I whirled to meet the onrush of two men. One engaged me, the other's fighting

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cry turned to a shriek that was swiftly ended. Mushmango had come up the ladder and, with one swing of that wondrous sword of his, had fairly shorn the man in twain as I have seen *sabreurs* sever the carcass of a sheep in exhibition.

In the waist the savages were conquering. They had been maddened by their heavy losses and fought in the impending dark as if every second was their last chance to strike. I heard some shouts for quarter. On the poop Mushmango chased a fleeing figure that rushed to the rail. Even as he mounted it the Arab blade shore through his neck at the base and the headless trunk smashed inboard. The chief turned to me and laughed.

"Fight he no more," he said.

We had won. Six or seven figures lay prone upon the poop, among them Sir Richard. Mushmango and myself were the only two upright. I knelt in the lull by Sir Richard's side and raised his head. His eyes were open and he was fully conscious.

"I fear I'm done for, lad," he said. "I should bleed more. The tide turns inward. Have we got the ship?"

Amber mounted the ladder and came to us. There was a cut across his wide chest that opened as he breathed but he was laughing.

" 'Tis but a scrape to the bone," he said. " 'Tis all over, save some stabbing. Those Andriana folk are devils to kill. No use to give quarter. The schooner's gone. We cut the grapples and she went."

In the fight I had been barely conscious of a heeling deck which must have been the tug of the sinking vessel. I had not noted the disappearance of the *Falcon*.

"We must get Sir Richard to the cabin," I said. "Where's Michael?"

"He's hunting Flipper Fenton. There's a knot of the villains forward. The rest have had enough and quittance."

Mushmango went forward to the final flurry and Amber and I took Sir Richard to his own cabin, and laid him in his bunk.

"Have you found Frank?" he asked.

In the fast fury of it all I had actually forgotten the lad. Indeed there had been neither time nor chance to seek him. Don, my collie dog, too, was somewhere, though the firing and turmoil would be like to have sent him below. And Peter also was missing.

I searched the other cabins and came out upon the mid-deck. It was a slaughter-house. White men and islanders lay in heaps. Others leaned on rail and rigging in exhaustion. The planks were red, a a crimson tide ran in the scuppers. I stumbled over the dead and dying as I worked forward to the forecastle. The last rays of twilight were shivering behind the mountains. In another moment it would be dark.

In the bows a knot of men still struggled. From them broke a bloody figure with another in hot pursuit. It was Fenton and Michael. Fenton was weaponless and the agony of fear was on his face. Michael's great hand caught him by the shoulder and whirled him about as the giant swiftly stooped and plucked a cutlas from a dead hand, thrusting it upon Fenton's reluctant grip.

"Take this and fight, —— ye," cried Michael. "Fight, like the rat ye are! Wast with Davis, eh, you back-stabber? Then prove it!"

A queer whistling shriek came from Fenton's lips, and, like a cornered rat, he exploded in a sudden frenzy of blows. Each one Michael deftly parried, a grim smile on his blood-streaked face. His beard-handkerchief was gone and the long hairs matted with gore. Afterward, I found he had wiped his slippery hands upon it. The whistling noise still came in gasps from Fenton, and then, as suddenly as if a lamp had been blown out, the darkness fell and a myriad stars twinkled, gathering strength each moment.

From the two swords sparks shot as from a grindstone. Then Michael spoke.

"Now—have it."

There was a groan and a thud and the giant turned toward me.

"That ends the score. Sam Pike will sing no more chanteys. I slit his weasand. Fenton has told his last lie. Martin is paid for. Hast found the lad?"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE KINK IN MADDEN'S BRAIN

NIGHT had fallen. The starshine dripped through the rigging and shot-torn canvas as we heaved on the ground-swell of the windless sea. The ghastly aftermath of the combat was in progress.

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From every side came groans and cries for water. There had been no quarter given by the infuriated savages who formed the large majority of our fighting force and, as the tally later showed, but seventeen of the threescore men which had formed the piratical crew remained alive, all of them wounded, five of them yet to die. And, man for man, almost, so we reckoned our own dead.

But that came later. As I stood with Michael by the dead body of Flipper Fenton, some one moved toward us from the foot of the forward deck ladders.

"Who goes there?" I cried.

"Friend," said a somber voice that I recognized as Simeon's. "It is over with. We have given quarter to a dozen or more of them forward. The natives stopped fighting with the darkness or they would have massacred them all. They have already thrown down their arms. Young Isaac has passed. But I have avenged him. Where is Sir Richard?"

The moodiness of the man who had fought so stoutly seemed somehow to rob our victory of its exaltation. I felt strangely faint. My own voice sounded far away.

"He's in his own cabin—the central one aft," I said. "Grievously wounded. I go to search for young Madden."

"I am somewhat of a leech," said Simeon. "I'll attend him."

As he left us I found myself swaying. Michael caught me by the arm.

"You are dripping blood," he said. "Must be tended."

"We'll—find—lad—first," I muttered, calling on my will to bolster my waning strength.

"Too much blood—lost—already," I dimly heard Michael say, and felt myself limp in his arms.

I came to in the fo'ksle. A lantern was shining back of me. I was on the floor, my head pillowed on a pile of hammocks. My left arm was bound to my side and there was a compress at my shoulder. Somewhere Michael had found rum and now held a pannikin of it to my lips, coaxing me as if I had been a baby, his rough voice tender as his arm was strong about me. I essayed to swallow some of the stuff, and it ran through my veins like fire. For a moment I was drunk and the cabin spun, then my brain cleared.

"Flesh wound," said Michael. "You've lost a sight of blood. Rum will take its place. How dost feel, dear lad?"

There was genuine affection in his voice that spoke as older man to younger without thought of rank or position.

"Better," I said, with truth. "A bit dizzy yet, but I can stand." And I proved it. "Let's look for the lad."

Michael steadied me for a while, but I got a grip on myself and, after the first faintness had passed, was well enough.

Frank was not in the fo'ksle, nor did we find trace of Peter.

"He would not have fought with them," I said. "Peter, I mean. If he had stayed on deck, our men would have attacked him. He must have known who we were."

We searched the gun-deck and peered into every cranny, calling their names. But there was no sign of them.

"There's the *lazarette*," said Michael.

It lay below the main cabin, reached by a hatch at the foot of the poop ladder. Michael lifted it and instantly there came a short, sharp bark from the blackness into which he lowered the lantern.

"Don!" I cried.

There was a rush in the dark pit and into the light of the lantern came Don, leaping up at me and barking out his heart.

We made shift to get down among the stores, Michael almost lifting me, and followed Don among the barrels and cases back to the stern end of the *lazarette*. The collie stopped with waving tail at an opening between two casks and turned his faithful eyes toward us. Michael thrust forward the lantern and peered over the casks.

"He's crawled in here, poor lad," he said. "I'm feared he's gone, Mr. Penrith."

He set his strength to the casks and shouldered one of them aside, stepping into the breach between them and bringing out a limp, bedraggled form.

It was Frank Madden, emaciated, unconscious, a bloody bandage about his head. Michael bore him to the deck and so into the main cabin where we laid him down. Simeon came out and bent over him.

"The boy's half-starved," he said. "And he has been cruelly abused. Get me some biscuit and some spirits. Ye'll find them in Sir Richard's cabin."

Michael brought them while Simeon dexterously loosened the bandage and

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exposed a raw wound above the temple. Don licked the lad's hand as if to aid.

"Look," said Simeon.

Frank's shirt sleeve—he had no jacket—was torn and his arm showed weals and bruises. Simeon crushed the biscuit and moistened it with the rum and managed, by forcing the boy's teeth apart, to squeeze some of the dripping mess into his mouth, stroking his throat to help him swallow. There was a convulsive action and the food disappeared. Simeon fed him more, and he shuddered and opened his eyes.

"Don't beat me," he said. "I have done my best. I'll drown myself, I tell ye."

"It's all right, Frank," I said, repeating it soothingly. "It's all right, lad."

He opened his eyes again and fastened them upon me. Slowly recognition came to him and he tossed his thin arms about my neck and sobbed as if his soul were being wrenched from his body.

"They beat me, Justin," he whimpered. "They made me their drudge. And Pike and Fenton promised me I should be their chief. They whipped me. Is it really you? Tell me, are they all dead?" There was a flash of spirit in the last sentence.

"Most of them," I said, some inkling of the truth coming to me. "You're safe now. I'll put ye in my cabin."

"Sir Richard is asking for him," said Michael.

"No," moaned the lad. "Not Sir Richard! Justin, I have wronged ye all! Yet—first he wronged me."

And once more vindictiveness showed in his manner.

"He is dying," said Simeon. "Ye had best see him."

"Dying? Oh, my God! Then I killed him!"

We soothed his hysterical outburst at last and fed him a little more before Simeon carried him to Sir Richard.

Sir Richard lay pale and motionless, a fleck of blood bubbling to his lips which Simeon wiped away.

"Well, lad," he said, faintly. "So ye are sound. And Don, too."

I called the dog down from the bed and Michael laid the lad upon the broad bunk by his uncle's side.

"Gently, lad," warned Simeon.

Frank kept his face hidden.

"It is all my fault," he went on. "Nunky, I knew that my money was gone. I have a twist in my brain as well as my body. It was I conspired with Sam and Fenton. Where are they?"

"Dead," said Michael.

"Ye were not to be harmed, they told me. I was to stay aboard while ye went for the treasure. Ye were to be given chance to join us—or left awhile on the island. I meant to send for ye. Then I heard the firing and they told me the savages had killed ye all. And they mocked me. I was their butt. They took my crutch and my stick. They beat me when I could not serve them quickly. They shot Peter when he stood between us. And they laughed at my antics. I told them I would drown myself.

"This afternoon when they sighted the ship they took, they broke into the *lazarette* for more liquor. And, while they were drinking, I crawled in and hid. Presently they called me and then they closed the hatch, thinking mayhap I had drowned myself, as I had said. Then the fight—and then another! I thought I was dying——"

"There, there, lad," said Sir Richard. "Hast made confession. 'Tis time for mine. Liquor was my bane. It cheated my brain and cocked the dice I played with to recover the lad's money I had wasted. Then came this treasure. I borrowed more money from Simeon here. Those deeds and signatures were fair, Simeon, the last ones."

Simeon nodded. The dying man's voice waned with his strength.

"But the treasure will make amends for all," he went on. "Enough to repay you, Simeon, for the forgeries, enough to pay back Frank here and redeem his mother's property from your pledge. Plenty for all, I reckon. Fret not, lad."

"Treasure." The boy's voice shrilled. "*But there is no treasure.*" The news fell like a plummet between us all. "I drew the map. Sam told me how to mark it. I planned the reckoning in the ring. We set it all down in the letter Simpkins bore to Fenton and he scored the ring and burned the map. I knew that *you*—had—*lost* my money—or most of it. I knew that otherwise I could not travel. It was my twisted brain, nunky. Forgive me."

"So," said Sir Richard, in a whisper, "there is no treasure after all! Well, lad, can not be helped. But I have failed in my

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trust. My sister—your mother—no treasure——"

"No treasure?"

It was Michael who spoke. Amber had come into the cabin without our notice.

"Who says there is no treasure? Why the ship half sinks with it. There is more at Maritan. The schooner held but little. Eh, Amber. Sequins and broad pieces, gold-dust and diamonds. Two Moorish ships they captured. Enough to buy a kingdom. Treasure? Towne's hoard was but a pocketful to this."

Sir Richard raised his head with an effort and Simeon slipped a pillow under it.

"What? The dice fall right at last?"

He began to laugh, the bright blood poured from his lips that still smiled after his spirit had fled.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END

WE HAD crossed the line, rich men all of us, few though we were. With Simeon and his faithful seamen from the *Falcon*, who had survived the fight, there were just eight of us returning. The mutineers, what were left of them, were acting as seamen under trial. Simpkins was one of them, and he supplied confirmation of the plot that had been conceived by Frank Madden's warped brain. He had opened the letter that he bore to Fenton, and, in this knowledge, had, with the latter, plotted to sell a duplicate ring and chart to Simeon, already suspicious of something afoot.

Sir Richard had represented or forged certain matters to Levison, whereby the latter had lost much of his private means, through making good to those who had assisted in the loans. The money for the voyage had been secured on the guaranty of Mrs. Madden's share of the estate and Simeon had kept faith in respecting that transaction, while feeling himself justified in an attempt to recoup himself by securing the treasure first. Sam Pike's yarns and flatteries had persuaded Frank that he might become a pirate chieftain, only to be handled as a hunchback jester for the ribald mutineers.

But that was all past. As Michael had said, there was enough for all. To Simpkins alone we held no hope of pardon, yet I do not believe either Simeon or myself was sorry when he slipped ashore at Cape Town, where we recruited sufficient crew to work the *Golden Hope* home again.

"Michael," I said, as he stood at the wheel, "art sorry ye did not accept Dempaino's offer and live as a prince in Madagascar, to raise a brood of princelings?"

"Not I," he said, and sighed as he said it. "'Twould not have lasted. The girl was fair to look on and the life was easy, but it has ever been my trouble to never love one lass better than another. I am a fighting man and a rover, Mr. Penrith. Belike war has broken out with Spain."

And so it proved when we reached Plymouth. And, in that war, both Michael and I found better occupation for a while than spending our share of loot. Some day I have promised him to set down our adventures.

The lad lives and I think the kink in his brain has been straightened out. So his mother believes and tells me when I go to Madden Court.

And, Simeon? Simeon is a trusty friend of mine. 'Tis fortunate for me to have him for my man-of-business.

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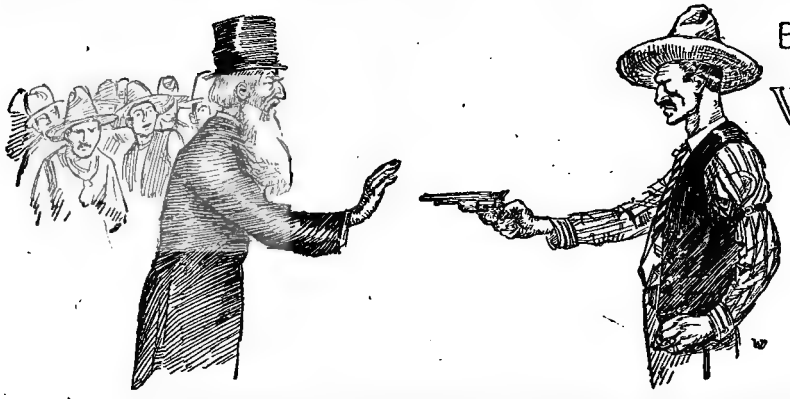
GODA'MIGHTY'S PARDNER



BY WILBUR HALL

Author of "Billy June and the Sinews of War," "The Plural Number," etc.

DOS PALMAS, looking up at the mountains and looking down on the desert, is the point of entry from the coast to all that great stretch of waste and volcanic wrack lying between Soda Lake and the Colorado River, and spreading northward to Death Valley and the Amargosas; and through Dos Palmas, as I have told you, many strange men pass. A few remain there, but Dos Palmas is too near to larger centers to attract the prosperous and spending, and too far from the mines and the mining country to hold the prospector or the hard-rock men. Except for the Agate mine, three miles southeast, Dos Palmas has no producing properties, and the desert rats say that it will never have.

However, the Agate is something. There are thirty men to the shift there now, and the Agate is making dividends steadily—dividends that go to men and women who are still rubbing their eyes over their riches. The mine was developed by Andrew Phane, and this tale, heard now in Dos Palmas occasionally, concerns him and those dividends the Agate pays—pays since "Diamond Andy" Phane met "Goda'mighty's Pardner" and after an accounting was made.

Diamond Andy—so we called him—was a gambler by profession and knew to a gnat's hair the value of a straight, the meaning of a quick flush on another player's face, or the percentage of advantage to the dealer that there is in faro when half the deck has been turned. He did not deny also, that he knew more about controlling the drop of a roulette ball with light fingers pressed against the edge of the table, or the twelve ways there are for stacking a deck, or the law of averages relating to marked dice, than most men—he admitted it laughingly.

There was always a certain defiance in his laugh, though. And if he had notched his gun-barrel to keep score of men it had brought down, in fair fights and foul, there were many who said that he would be able to file a saw with that seven-inch barrel easily enough.

When he came to Dos Palmas, however, Diamond Andy was a mine-owner and promoter. Probably he won the Agate mining-claim, and possibly he won it dishonestly, but no one ever appeared to dispute his title and he engaged a mining engineer to make a favorable report on the prospect and an assayer to find rich promise in its ores—that sort of engineer and assayer is not extinct, even today—and then he went East to promote his property. In Dos Palmas we concluded he would succeed.

Diamond Andy put up a great front, talked convincingly, looked prosperous, and had a particularly ingratiating manner with the women. He went, as we heard afterward, to a mill town in Massachusetts where he had a sister working in the cotton factories, and he sold her stock and sold her friends stock and sold their friends stock and came back at the end of eight months with eighteen thousand dollars for development work.

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The first development of the property he conducted in Chicago, too—bought himself four great white diamonds to add to the two or three smaller ones he had worn before, and Dos Palmas blinked when the desert sun struck those stones as he descended from the overland one September morning.

Strictly speaking, it was none of our business in Dos Palmas, for Phane did do development work and spent some of the money in the town. Also he hired forty or fifty men, and had them hard at it when a committee of two came on from Massachusetts in December, at Andy's expense, to look wisely at their mine and to go away completely satisfied. The day after they left Andy cut his force of fifty to four. Still it wasn't our business. And Massachusetts is a long way from the Mohave Desert.

Then those four men made a strike on the Agate.

Dos Palmas sniffed and scoffed at the news, at first, but it was true. Scratching around to keep up appearances they ran on a thin thread of gold-bearing rock, followed it down, found it opening up, and began to realize its possibilities. Andy had been spending a good deal of time and money on the Coast, so this amazing discovery caught him short of funds to prosecute the work. He had the face, then, to go East with samples, call a meeting of his Massachusetts stockholders, dazzle them with the sight of pure gold in native rock, and induce them to vote an assessment.

Also he sold more stock—some of it, even, to the owner of the factory himself, and the forewomen and people who had been skeptical before. Most of his shareholders, however, were poor girls and women, who mortgaged their wages years ahead to get money for the certificates and to meet the assessment. Diamond Andy Phane came back with another ten thousand dollars and the Agate began to ship ore.

Aside from dropping everything to prospect miles of territory all around the Agate—and getting nothing for our pains—we just accepted the Agate and Diamond Andy and his women stockholders then, and Andy stayed on the job and began to spend money in our little town until outsiders heard of it and came rushing in to pick up some of Andy's gold. Two gambling houses, furnished in style and with a game or two we had never seen played, were part of the new business of Dos Palmas. Andy set the pace, his own miners and the younger men followed his lead, and Dos Palmas took on quite the air of a frontier camp with a bonanza at its doors.

Andy showed his true colors soon. He was a natural-born bully and dictator, and his reputation as a bad man was enhanced by an occasional quick gun-play. Inside of two years he was riding roughshod over the town, making his own laws and pleasing himself at the expense of every one who would have dealings with him. There were a few men who would not take this sort of treatment, but they were peaceably inclined and left Phane to his own devices.

Monk Morgan, the deputy sheriff, Billy Strange, of the general store, and some others outfaced Andy when he tried his tricks on them, and he left them alone. But all his cronies and followers and admirers and those others who feared him as they would a plague clung to the belief that, if it ever came to a fight, Diamond Andy Phane would drop any five men in camp. Andy was content with this sort of reputation—the men concerned didn't care.

IN THE shank of Summer, when those people in Dos Palmas who haven't gotten out for a vacation are ragged-edged from the heat and those who have are cursing because they've had to come back into it, we saw a stranger in town. All of us saw him. You couldn't miss him. He dropped from a westbound train and he was the queerest old codger that ever Dos Palmas entertained, accustomed as it was to oddities. He was tall and angular and stooped. He wore black clothes, with a long-tailed coat, and a stiff white collar and a black tie, and on his head was a faded and crumpled silk hat.

His traveling equipment was a battered valise with a hole in one corner and with the cuff of an extra white shirt squeezed out of the mouth and trailing behind, and a Bible. We had had preachers before in Dos Palmas, but none like this one. Two or three rednecks in front of Bob's bar hooted and argued the question of making the old man cut off his long white beard

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and deliver a sermon on the spot. But when they went at him his words and his eye held them up.

"Good morning, men," he said, in a strong even voice. "I want to find a lodging-house. They told me on the train that Duff's was my place. Where is Duff's, if you please?"

Because he had walked toward them instead of stopping or shrinking back they were checked and some one told him which of our Dos Palmas shacks was Duff's.

"Goin' to set up a meetin'-house, ain't you, brother?" "Red" Forgan asked.

"If it is the Lord's will," the old man said.

"Which lord were you speakin' of?" says some one.

"The Lord of Hosts."

"Some mistake," Forgan answered. "No such party in this desert."

"He is in the wilderness and in the depths of the sea. His voice is in the wind and His wrath in the whirlwind."

Forgan and his crew grunted, but they went back to Bob's.

"Cracked and harmless," Mike Blackmore commented. "If he sticks around maybe he'll save Diamond Andy's immortal soul."

The Rev. Joshua Warren made no effort to save any one's immortal soul at first. Johnny Slagle and I ran into him up Cradle Creek a week or so after he came, when we went to lay a new pipe from the dam that supplied Dos Palmas with water—when there was any water to be had. The old man was on his knees, and we thought at first he was praying. But he was digging.

"Hello, Parson," Slagle said. "You'll need a box of powder before you go very far down on that ledge."

The old man looked up calmly.

"I don't know very much about prospecting," he said, "but I'm learning. I've found a piece of quartz with gold in it."

"That's the turkey, Parson," Johnny said, smiling. "What is it—free milling? Or sulphurets?"

"My partner knows."

"Oh, your pardner! Somebody grubstaking you, eh?"

"Yes."

"Mining man?"

We started at his answer, delivered like cold fact.

"No. He is God Almighty."

"Oh," we said.

We didn't laugh. The old man was dead in earnest.

"Yes, if I am chosen to find riches in the earth it will be at His direction. Look at this rock, will you, gentlemen?"

It was a piece of porphyry float with flecks of mica in it, as we expected. Slagle told him so.

The old man got up from his knees and looked at the sample and at his hole a minute, sorrowfully, and then he moved off down the cañon.

"I wasn't trusting everything to Him," he said, thoughtfully. "I was trusting too much to myself."

After that, and a dozen other instances like it, there was only one thing to think—that the old gentleman was as crazy as a loon. Dos Palmas got used to him—we called him Goda'mighty's Pardner by general consent. When he went around town—into saloons and the two gambling houses as well as everywhere else—and said he was going to hold a Sunday service the town flocked out to hear him. He preached pretty straight from the shoulder, and didn't sound crazy, as near as any of us knew about religion.

But the very next day he went to Diamond Andy Phane and tried to sell him an idea he had for blowing up the Lone Tree mountain, that the Agate mine was in, and gathering the gold with buckets when the dust had cleared away. Andy was feeling pretty good that day, or showing off to the miners, or whatever, and he told the old man to go on into the mine and take some measurements there that the parson said he needed to prove up his plan. Goda'mighty's Pardner was as serious as an owl about the offer and thanked Andy and told him he would make him a multi-millionaire with divine aid.

One day Johnny Slagle came in with Strange and Monk Morgan, and they called me into the back room, looking glum.

"Well," I said, "who's dead now?"

"You tell him, Strange," Johnny said.

"It's just a story, Port," Billy Strange began. "But it comes pretty straight. The Agate isn't paying any dividends on its stock."

"Isn't it? That's funny. I thought——"

"It never has," Strange interrupted.

"Oh," I said, "that's a mistake. Diamond Andy told me——"

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"That lying card-sharp!" Monk Morgan exclaimed. "Of course he told you—he's made us all believe the same thing. But he's been putting the profits from the Agate into his own pockets and the only thing the stockholders have had is assessments to pay. Three in the last two years."

"That's the racket, eh?" I said. "The or'nery skunk!"

"And we're figuring what to do about it," Monk concluded.

We talked it up one side and down the other and then Strange said the only thing to do was for one of us to go back to Massachusetts and get the straight of it from those girls and women in the mills and come home with a definite case to go on. Snap judgment wouldn't do—we had to have the goods on Diamond Andy Phane. Law business was slack and Johnny Slagle could draw up leases and quitclaim deeds as well as anybody—they sent me.

I was gone two months, because I found it wasn't going to do to let those women know what I was up to, and I had to work very cautiously. Diamond Andy had fooled them too. And what was more, I didn't want to have some foolish girl who thought Phane was a western novel hero, to be wiring or writing and putting him on his guard. It was tough work to keep from boiling over as the case developed, but I managed it somehow and came back seeing red. Morgan and Slagle met me at the train.

There were about a dozen men in the back office that night, and at first they talked of lynching. But that would leave things up in the air pretty much and cause no end of legal difficulties putting the Agate into shape so that the bona-fide stockholders could get what belonged to them out of Andy's past profits. We argued until late and didn't arrive anywhere. All we did do was arrange to watch Andy and the mine more closely and try to figure out what the Agate was producing and how much in dividends it ought to be paying. And we'd meet again.

Going down Main Street early the next morning I passed Andy Phane's adobe house—pretty stylish shack for Dos Palmas—and was surprised to see Goda'mighty's Pardner sweeping off the porch. He had his long black coat off and an apron around him and he was a comical sight—a scarecrow in a child's dress, with his whiskers hanging over the top of it!

"Hello, Pardner," I said, "I thought you were mapping the Agate to blow out the gold. What's happened?"

The old man leaned on the broom and put his wild-looking eyes on me.

"Andy's Mexican boy is sick today and I promised him I would do his work. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren ye have done it unto Me.' "

"What's wrong with Lopez? He looked husky enough yesterday."

"These things are in God's hands," the old preacher answered. "He moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

"You think he'd bother with a greaser, Pardner?"

" 'Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?' "

You never got the best of Goda'mighty's Pardner; he had all the arguments. So I laughed and went on, and forgot the old loon.

OUR vigilance committee was to have met in our back office that night, but we didn't. Johnny Slagle and I were in the White Front about seven o'clock, talking to some railroad men about a spur track we'd asked them to give Dos Palmas, and Diamond Andy came in. He had been drinking, of course, and was more offensive and surly than usual. He bought for every one but our little group, because Johnny and I had refused to drink with him before and he always passed us up. Then he went over to the faro table and bought a stack.

In fifteen minutes there was a big crowd around him, for he was going higher than ever and playing gold coins and new greenbacks he'd just brought in from San Francisco. The table made a great sight to look it. Half a dozen of Andy's cronies and mimics bought in, because they always thought he brought them luck.

We went on with our talk and had the matter fixed satisfactorily. Just as we were getting up Goda'mighty's Pardner came in through the street doors and walked over toward the faro layout table. He didn't visit saloons except when he was announcing a Sunday service, and so his coming attracted some attention. He walked to the wall behind the dealer, laughing and shaking hands and being joked

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by the crowd, but he didn't pause until he had faced around and stood confronting Diamond Andy Phane across the layout.

Andy looked up and saw him there. A scowl darkened his face.

"What the blanketty-blank do you want in here?" Andy snarled at Goda'mighty's Pardner, savagely. "You're a jinx in those black clothes of yours! Come on out of it!"

Goda'mighty's Pardner stood fast.

"I've come to be a jinx to you, Andrew Phane," he said, and his voice was such that every one stopped and turned to see the play.

It was the voice he used in his Sunday preaching, and there wasn't a crazy note in it. Even Diamond Andy gaped.

But he was angry and he soon recovered. He let fly a mouthful of bitter language and clenched his fists.

"Come on out from there, I tell you!" he shouted. "I'm not going to tell you again!"

"You don't need to, Phane. Save your breath. You are a cowardly criminal grafter and a thief and a liar! You have been robbing half a thousand poor girls and women in my little town back in Massachusetts for two years and now you are going to make a settlement!"

I heard a gasp behind me and turned to find Monk Morgan and Billy Strange and the Maranville boys—the rest of our vigilance committee—close behind me. The news had spread that Goda'mighty's Pardner was going to clean out the White Front and the whole of Dos Palmas was crowding in to hear and see.

"His little town!" Morgan whispered to me. "What do you know about that?"

"I know we'd better be working up to the table!" I snapped. "Diamond Andy's got his gang with him and they may get rough."

So we moved forward, spreading out in the crowd, and when we came to the group around the layout we had missed some of the wrangle there. But we heard Goda'mighty's Pardner summing up.

"I don't want any trouble, Phane. I know that I'm telling the truth as surely as you do. And before you leave this place you are going to sign a release on the Agate property. Then you are going to quit Dos Palmas forever."

"You dashed old lunatic!" Phane shouted, and began edging around the faro-table toward the old minister.

Goda'mighty's Pardner put out a hand.

"I warn you not to come too near!" he said quietly.

I thought for an instant that here was a man who didn't need much help. Whether it was because he was God's partner or not he was facing the gunman pretty coolly.

"Don't come too near me, man," he repeated. "I have a little mission in that mill town back home, and it was to some of the honest hard-working men and women in my mission that you sold your stock—stock in the Agate. I came out here three months ago, suspecting that something was wrong. I worked my way into the mine and I've made measurements and calculations as to the amount of ore you have taken out.

"Its value has been figured for me by a mining engineer whose word would be taken count of by any court in America. According to his estimates you have mined and shipped something over three hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of ore in the last year. Your total profits must have been nearly three hundred thousand. In addition you have taken twelve thousand dollars in assessments from those poor working-girls in Milltown. Now you settle!"

Before any of us could get nearer Diamond Andy pushed those nearest him back with a sudden wide sweep of his hands, clearing the space between him and Goda'mighty's Pardner. Then he reached back, shouting oaths. The bystanders needed nothing more. They melted away. And the preacher did not so much as blink.

"Be warned, Andrew Phane!" he cried, in a loud, ringing voice.

Phane laughed aloud and swore, blusteringly. But it was plain that he was shaken by the old man's nerve. And he was more shaken before he was through. Goda'mighty's Pardner stepped out to meet him. He walked forward until Andy Phane's big revolver was out and leveled at his chest. He leaned forward and laid his hand on the revolver just as Diamond Andy, his face white, pulled the trigger.

The hammer fell with a click—and that was all!

Goda'mighty's Pardner did not change a muscle. His hand closed around the barrel of the gun as Andy tried twice more

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to shoot. The hammer fell with nothing more than a sharp *t-ckk!* The preacher took a grip on the revolver and twisted it ever so lightly, and in the next instant the revolver was tossed to my feet! The crowd, relieved, burst into a roar of laughter.

Diamond Andy, fighting to get control of himself, was instantly deserted. His cronies backed away from him as though he were a contamination. He looked about him and everywhere encountered black scowls. Monk Morgan and the rest of us closed in.

"He's—he's lying," Diamond Andy blustered. "He's got the Indian sign on me—with his talk about being God's Pardner."

"He's got the Indian sign on you with his talk about your being a dirty crook and a robber of women!" Johnny Slagle shouted, angrily. "Monk Morgan and Porter Brown and two or three of us have been looking you up on our own hook, lately, Andy Phane, and if Goda'mighty's Pardner hadn't beaten us to it we would have taken care of you pretty shortly. You'd better do what he orders; and do it quick."

"I'm taking a dirty deal!" Phane mumbled, "but what is it you want, Preacher?"

WHEN Andy Phane was miles down the railroad track, with only a canteen of water left for all his worldly goods, and with his mine and his diamonds in the possession of the old missionary, Rev. Joshua Warren, I walked down Main Street with the boys of our vigilance committee.

"Did you fellows ever hear of a gun failing fire three times in one loading before?" Monk Morgan asked.

"No, I never did," Johnny Slagle said.

There was a sort of awe in their voices.

"Of course there ain't nothing in it," Frank Maranville said. "But it certainly looks as though the old man *is* Goda'mighty's Pardner."

I stopped.

"I don't pretend to be religious, boys," I said, "and I can't quote the Bible like old man Warren. But I think it says in that Book that God helps them that help themselves, don't it?"

"No, that's Shakespeare or somebody," says Billy Strange.

"Whoever it is," I said, "I figure that Goda'mighty might have a little to do with it, but His Pardner had more. Look at these."

And I held out the cartridges that I had taken from Andy Phane's gun when Goda'mighty's Pardner threw it over to my feet in the White Front.

They held them under the light from Duff's front windows.

"Geewhillikins!" Monk Morgan cried. "Powder emptied out of 'em—and the bullet put back, as neat as wax!"

"How did that happen?" Billy Strange asked.

"I only know," I said, "that Goda'mighty's Pardner was doing the housework for Lopez at Phane's this morning."

Dan Maranville whooped.

"Holy smoking mackerel, listen to me! Goda'mighty's Pardner worked himself into the Agate mine because Phane thought what the rest of us did—that the old preacher was crazy. He got the information he needed and laid his plans to get Phane with the crowd around. And he tinkered with those cartridges while he was helping Mexican Lopez out! Lopez was sick this morning, you said, Port?"

"That was what the old man told me."

Maranville laughed.

"I saw Lopez this afternoon. He looked like a ghost. Said he'd had coffee with Goda'mighty's Pardner this morning, feeling fine, and right afterward he came down sick, suddenly."

"Knock-out drops!" we cried.

Johnny Slagle looked around at us all.

"We thought he was crazy," he said, "and we organized a vigilance committee and couldn't do anything when we had it ready. I move the vigilance committee be adjourned, or whatever it is."

I guess we all felt a little sheepish. The committee was adjourned.

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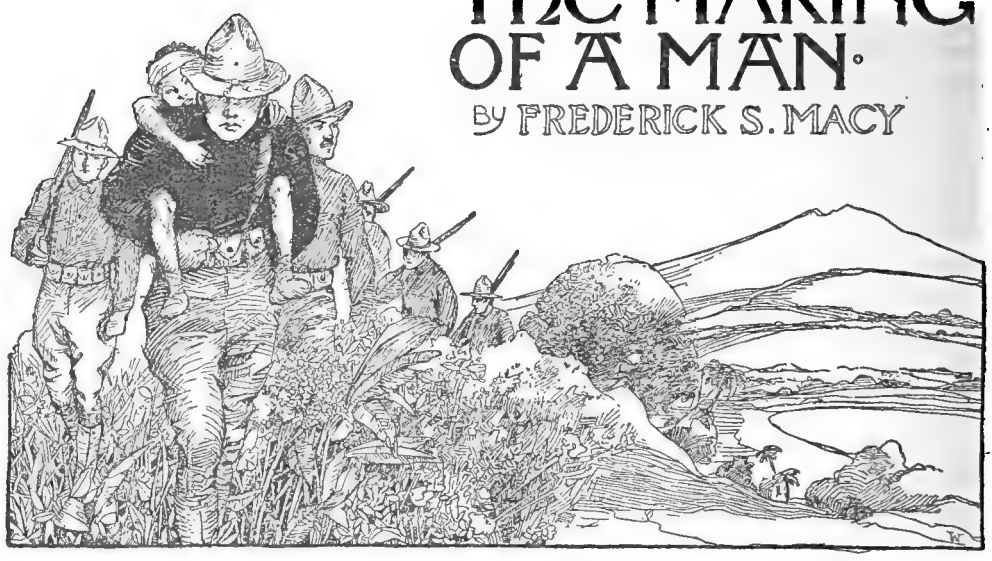
The MAKING OF A MAN

BY FREDERICK S. MACY



Author of "The One Sheep That Was Lost."

SOMEWHERE on the Island of Leyte, during a hot afternoon in the "days of the empire," Sergeant Dyckman conducted his men cautiously up a low hill into a clump of plantains.

"Take cover here," he whispered, "and lie quiet while I have a look."

He left them at rest in the soothing shade, strode forward to the farther bound of their shelter, and studied the view intently from among the big, flat leaves.

He was tall and lean and straight, with fifty years over his grizzled head, but young with the blood of a clean, active life. His brow was broad, his nose long and generous. Except for a hint of humor and a trace of care his smooth, firm lips were unadorned. His face was tanned with the suns of the tropics and deeply wrinkled about the steel-gray eyes from squinting into the silver glare of desert and ocean waste.

He had fought Geronimo's men on the Western plains, succored the victims of fire and flood in stricken lowlands and guarded the peace of frontiers. He had faced the lead and the iron of the Spaniards, the dread typhoon of the China Sea and the bolo men of the Islands. He embodied the power of a noble man, the tenderness of a gentle woman, the trustfulness of a child. He was a soldier.

He stood there screened in the foliage, absorbedly gazing here and there, searching a paradise for a threat of evil. His khaki garb was a promise of help against it; a token of consecration, from the faded campaign hat pushed back on his sweating forehead to the canvas leggings above his muddied shoes.

Even the pose of his feet was expressive of strength and confidence, and the hand that parted the leaves was wide and strong, its import kind. To the men behind him he was a mortal god.

While he stood a corporal joined him.

"Anything doing, Sergeant?"

"I don't like it," said Sergeant Dyckman without turning his head. "Here, look it over yourself."

Before them the ground declined to a level plain that flowed to a rocky range a thousand yards away. At the left a high, domed mountain humped itself like a sleeping monster and reached forward nearly to the heights beyond. A stream crept out of the gap there, and twisted across the open into miles of rice fields on the right.

Between the giant peak and the pigmy mound was a jungle-filled ravine that led back somewhere into a wilderness. It was as if the flat lands below had stretched forth a hand and thrust two outspread fingers

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into the hills. And over all quivered the dim blur of the heat haze.

"There's smoke," noted the corporal, nodding toward a bluish white pillar of cloud on a distant, palm-covered summit.

"Also there," replied the sergeant, indicating another only a few hundred yards away well up on the mountain.

He watched it dissipate, then lazily climb again, now in short puffs, then in long ones.

He shook his head forebodingly.

"Our position's bad," he declared.

Yet tourists have journeyed far to see many a prospect less fair than this. For if the traveler liked majesty it was here where the soaring peak lifted its dark, uncovered head above the timber-line. Or, if he craved the sensuous, he could have felt it breathed to him from spicy orchids pendulous on Titan trees. He could have gloried in the beauty of color, the softening touch of the somber clefts which tempered the living green of the glistening fronds or blended the vivid scarlet of flowers into the shadows of the undergrowth.

He could have felt the presence of mystery in the silence, which is Nature thinking. He could have peopled the drooping bamboos with sprites who fluttered the dancing leaves or startled brilliant parrots into flight through swinging tangles of vines. He could have observed the enacting of an eternal drama in the broken line of plumaged hills, in the manifest might of the unvoiced earth, and read, if he would, an epic in the rice fields here in this heart of Leyte.

To him, the two thin columns of smoke would have been merely a proof of human life in the peacefulness of Eden. He might have wondered what manner of men were there and what they were doing or how they lived, and sent them a friendly thought. But that is probably all the consideration he would have given the matter. To Sergeant Dyckman, those fires meant active enmity, possibly death.

"Manney," he ordered, "deploy the men along the front of this clump of trees over here on the right, and backward along the edge of the ravine at our left. You take charge there and I'll look after this. We'll get action pretty soon. They've spotted us, I think. If I'm wanted I'll be here in the angle between the two lines. And if the men have to talk, make 'em do it in whispers."

The other departed, and when the men had rustled away to their stations all was still. He lay down with his rifle beside him, watching the mountain, the plain and the smoke. There was nothing to do but to wait.

AFTER several minutes he heard some one creeping toward him from behind. He sat up and turned quickly, his eyes cold and keen. It was not long before a figure in blue shirt and khaki presented itself.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "You, eh, Rooky? What is it?"

"I can't see any one, Sergeant, and I can't stand it."

"Afraid, eh?"

"I guess so."

"H'm! It takes a good man to admit that, Willetts. You'll make a soldier yet. We all get frightened sometimes. It's not the man who doesn't know what fear is who's brave. Not by a long sight. It's the fellow who does what he's afraid to do. Go back to your post even if you are scared, and get courage by thinking there's prob'ly another just as bad off as you are sticking it out. Go ahead, now!"

"Oh, Sergeant, I can't!"

"Sh! Keep quiet! Go on, I tell you."

"Please don't send me, Sergeant," he chattered softly, "I can't stand it all alone that way. I'm a coward. I know it, but I can't help it. Let me stay here awhile till I feel different. Please, for the love of Mary!"

The boy was ghastly, his dark hair matted with the perspiration of two long days of hiking, his brown eyes filled with shame and terror, his full lips trembling.

"All in," concluded the old man.

"There," he said reassuringly, "sit down here and don't act like a woman. Buck up! Since you've mentioned my Mary I'll have a word to say to you anyhow. Do you remember what she said to you a few months ago?"

Recruit Willetts winced, and lowered his head, abased. Then he nodded, plucking nervously at the grass beside him.

"Well, say it again. Mebbe 'twill give you heart."

"She said to me," the youth whispered painfully, " 'You are no man. You can't do a man's work. You let even the office-boys flout you though you've brains enough

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to be boss. You're afraid to say your soul's your own. But I love you just the same,' she says to me, 'for the head you have and your clean heart, even if you are a craven. Go enlist in my father's company. It will either make you or break you. When he says you're a man, I'll marry you, and I'll wait for you, for I love no other.' That's what she said."

"And what did you say?"

"And I said, 'My soul is not my own, Mary, but His that made me the weakling I am. And my heart is not my own, for you have it and all that is in it. But I'll go to your father's company,' I said, 'such as I am, and I'll be no coward.' That's what I said, Sergeant."

"And for three months you've wilted on every hike and now you're a welter of fright. Is that the way to win, man, for the love of Mary? Will you go now?"

Without another word the lad gripped his rifle. Falteringly, trembling visibly, he crawled away. But he did not look back. And as he disappeared the old man heard him gulp a sob. He smiled.

"Hey, Rooky," he called just audibly. "Come here."

The boy heard and turned, uncertain. Then he slunk back.

"Stay here. Most likely I'll need a messenger from time to time, but don't think I'm favoring you. There's as much danger here as anywhere else. Only, if you run amok, I want to be on hand to collar you before you do any harm. And if you come to yourself and show the man that's in you, I want to be on hand to see that, too. Now get down close to the ground and look out, sharp."

They lay there in the mud of the mound while the blistering sun ran past the cloud flecks. It was trying work, this waiting for the devil in the paradise.

"What's that smoke over on the hills, Sergeant, that comes and goes?"

"Signal smoke. They work a code of dots and dashes by covering and uncovering a smudge. There's a crowd of gu-gus there, God knows how many."

"And that on the mountain here beside us. What's that?"

"Another."

Overhead the broad plantain leaves flapped lazily in a new breeze born of mid-afternoon.

"Smell the flowers, Rooky?"

"Mary'd like them, wouldn't she?"

The old man nodded and sighed.

They spoke no more for a space, engrossed in the watching.

"What's that over there in the bamboos?" whispered the boy, presently. "There, by that bend in the stream?"

"Monkeys."

The rooky laughed a little, oddly.

"The gu-gus won't come that way," explained the old man, ignoring the mood of the younger. "Prob'ly they'll sneak through the cogon grass down there and rush us; that is, if they have us outnumbered about fifty to one."

"Isn't the captain coming up?"

"How do I know? He'll be where he's needed most. Just now he's down there in the brush by the rice padis, he and the rest of the comp'ny. We know what we have to do and that's enough. The rest of 'em don't concern us."

"Well, what are we here for, anyway, Sergeant?"

"To hold this lump of dirt that's under us because it's part of a plan. That's all we have to know. If we knew as much as the captain, we'd all be captains. But we don't. We'll do as we're ordered and let him do the thinking."

"But suppose we can't do it?"

"In that case it won't make any difference to some of us. Either I or some one else will know what to do for the others, and that's enough for you. Only, we're not expecting to fall back, not those of us that are men, anyway."

The recruit asked no more questions. He endured the sting of the other's words in silence, and salved them with the balm of resolution. Perhaps the old warrior understood, for he added nothing further and interested himself in the scenery.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he inquired at last. "Wouldn't it be nice to have a home up there on the mountain with the birds and the flowers all around."

"Back in God's country, yes."

The shadows were longer now, the heat-waves not so trying to the eyes. It was then that the smoke faded out of the sky and did not recur.

"They've got it all fixed up now," observed Sergeant Dyckman. "Hope it suits 'em. We'll not have to wait long to know what it is, so keep your eyes open."

Almost as he finished there came a sound,

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like a single tap on an empty box, from somewhere up the valley opposite.

"So!" commented the old man. "Listen!"

The shot was followed by a volley, a faint rattle suggesting a finger drawn rapidly over the slats of a window-blind.

"Captain Spence and his native scouts. Doing good work, too. Hark to that now! That's the gu-gus."

It was a medley of irregular, unsystematic poppings, the unorganized firing of undisciplined hundreds. Another volley answered it and yet others, rhythmic, intimidating, pulsing through the incoherency. It was deadly, relentless, that work of the scouts. It conveyed a sense of determination, a feeling that it would never cease until it had accomplished its end.

LITTLE by little the crackling and the scattered popping grew louder. The ripple of the steady volleys became a roar. They were surging down the ravine, coming nearer and nearer.

"Steady, boy!" the sergeant admonished. "Our turn's coming in a minute. The scouts have got 'em on the run."

The recruit was ashy white. He could not speak.

"They'll either try to break through here or down the rice padis. In either case they're done for."

Just then a terrific fusillade broke forth from the mountain. Mauser and Remington spat into their very faces. It was deafening, appalling. And still the fire of the scouts beat through the din, confidently, irresistibly, so close was the conflict below, like a theme in a great symphony. Bullets snipped the plantain leaves or *whing-ed* musically overhead. But the men on the mound made no reply.

"Aren't you going to fire, Sergeant?" screamed the boy. "Aren't you going to fire?"

"Not till I see something to shoot at. Here!" he roared. "Be careful with that rifle! You'll hurt somebody first thing you know!"

And then a crash on the left.

"Manney," announced the sergeant. "Found 'em and giving 'em what for. Hey! Look out for your piece I told you!"

Recruit Willetts struggled with impulse and won. He removed his finger from the trigger, lowered his weapon, and steadied both it and himself as he lay there beside his leader.

"That's better," commended Sergeant Dyckman through the racket. "Get control of yourself and there's no room for panic."

Another smashing volley belched from Manney's small detachment and the fire on the mountain slackened. But it soon broke forth again as viciously as before. And while the corporal hammered at it the tumult below moved into the grass-covered plain; the sputter and the bang mingled at their very feet.

It was hateful, torturing, that structure of noise. It was solid, massive, crushing. In the shivered air above them wild birds darted directionless, their screams drowned in the inferno. A swarm of tiny missiles buzzed or whined without end, like taut wires complaining in a wind, and stones and sand slid down the slopes unheard, as in a picture on a screen. But not a man was seen, neither friend nor enemy.

Sergeant Dyckman moved his part of the line into the brush just below the crest of the mound, for greater protection against the flanking storm at his left.

Presently that abated, then died out altogether; and shortly afterward a horde of brown men broke from the cogon grass, crossed the shallow stream and disappeared in the undergrowth at the foot of the hills beyond. The scouts were firing at will, now. So, too, were Sergeant Dyckman's men and suddenly also, the captain's command, racing across the rice fields in pursuit. But not a rifle spoke on the ridge in the distance.

"What the deuce!" muttered the sergeant under his breath. "They've got away again. Not a soul there to stop 'em. It beats me," he concluded, wagging his head disgustedly.

But it was always that way. If no one blundered the ruffians escaped through their own cunning and by concealment. They were like snakes. One might stride across them, prone in the grass, and yet not find them. This time the issue had seemed certain, and yet there they were, swarming into the distant hills, safe. It was a cruel blow to men who had looked upon this as their last "hike."

In a few minutes more even the individual firing slackened. The captain raked the high grass of the open with a few volleys

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to drive out any of the enemy who might still be in it, and then all was silent as when they had waited so patiently, watching the smoke.

The sun was tinting the tips of the bamboos, the frightened creatures of the air and the jungle had found their shelters. Everything was empty, voiceless as a tomb. Only, the sun moved slowly into hiding behind the trees, and the shadows deepened in the valley. So oppressive was the void that it beat upon them maddeningly as the frightful din had done. Then a bird sang loudly and blissfully near them, incongruously joyous in the utter deathliness of the quiet places.

Sergeant Dyckman arose, but Willetts still remained upon the ground, He was staring unseeingly, turning his eyes here and there as if still alert against attack. The sergeant spoke to him, for the first time since the battle had approached; but Willetts only stood up, looking bewilderedly about him and frowning slightly as if trying to understand. Promptly but gently the old man took the lad's rifle from him just as Corporal Manney appeared.

"What'll we do now, Sergeant?"

"Wait here for orders. Mount a guard and let the men get supper. Prob'ly we'll stay here all night. Any casualties?"

"Two or three, slight. Nothing serious. How did you make out, Sergeant?"

The answer was a jerk of the thumb toward the rooky.

"Only this."

The other looked and comprehended.

"Loco!" he said sorrowfully, puckering his lips. "Well, you can't put bowels into a man if he hasn't got them. Too bad."

"Have him watched," ordered the senior, sharply.

THE merry bird had finished his halleluiah and the world was vacant again. The twilight lingered briefly as if for one last look and faded out of the sky. Where battle and sudden death had stained the soil a curtain of blackness was drawn and night submerged in a level pool of fathomless gloom, impenetrable, dense, the field where man had become a beast and flouted his brotherhood.

The clatter of mess tins had succeeded the rattle of volleys, the chirping of insects the crash of musketry, and the sighing requiem of evening winds told of mysterious things beyond the glow of the camp-fire, of a world of life unseen but felt, that disdained the power of men, banished them to themselves, and shut them in.

It was then that a new sound reached them out of the murky chasm, the voice of a child crying piteously somewhere below in the darkness. It was the bitter, despairing sobbing of a little boy grieving heartbrokenly into space, alone and helpless. Isolated, there in the night, he yielded his man-pride to the solitude.

For aught he knew there was none to hear and he sorrowed unrestrainedly. He cried out his despair and his hopelessness to the unpitying hills with the fear of death upon him. Perhaps it comforted him so to do. It was as if his baby heart stood naked in its last surrender, and the men heard and understood.

"That tears the very throat of me," the sergeant said. "I've got to go down."

So he summoned three men and started with them toward where the sorrowing seemed to be. And Willetts, automaton, moved to follow. The corporal held him back, at first, but the old man let him come, for he saw that the lad knew only him. They clambered down to the foot of the hill, and very soon came to a shack in the cogon. There they entered, and immediately the boy stilled his outcry. But they heard him gasping convulsively, though they could not see him for the blackness of the place.

Some one struck a match and lighted a primitive lamp. Then they beheld him huddled upon the floor, gazing at them through big, brown eyes wet and sad. And beside him was a crumpled shape that had been a woman.

When the men made it out in the dim, flickering light, they paused reverently and uncovered instinctively. None fears death less than the soldier nor respects it more. And Willetts, puppet-like, imitated them, but looked most at the boy, who had not moved. For the child was thin and wan, and altogether pitiable.

His feet were rudely bandaged and his clothing blood-stained. They gathered about him, and when one of them removed the rags to replace them with a first-aid dressing, they cursed softly at what they saw. The sergeant, with set jaw, asked him who he was.

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"I am Esteban, son of Juan and Marcelina," he replied, weakly but boldly, looking up for only an instant from the busy hands attending him.

"What is your other name?"

"Godinez, señor."

"How old are you?"

"I do not know, señor. I think nine, perhaps."

"And what has happened here?"

"Last week, señor, it is already five days, came the *banditos*. We hid in the grass but they found us. And first they killed my father, but not all at once, little by little over a long time. He was a friend to the *Americanos*, señor, so they made him suffer. And when he had died they ate his heart to increase their courage.

"Then they took my mother and maimed her so that the infant, my sister, should starve. And last of all they cut off my great toes, as you see, so that I could do nothing for my mother nor walk as a man should, ever again. Then they went away, hurrahing loudly for independence.

"And when they had gone and my mother had done what she could for us to bear the pain, she crawled to where my father lay and buried him, charging me, if I lived, to get a priest some day to consecrate the ground and to say masses over him and her. But no priest of our own people will come, señor, for less than three hundred pesos, and what can I do? *Ai, Dios!*

"We gave the little one rice and water, but soon we could no longer prepare any food whatever, since we were both too ill of fever. So, presently, the infant cried always more weakly from my mother's lap and since yesterday morning has been still. My mother has been as you see since the evening, drooped over the child. And I have had only water from the jar here beside me, since two days, now, señor."

Men accept the ordinary tragedy as inevitable. They are awed by it and filled with compassion. But there is a species of disaster so stupendous, so devilish, the acme of cruelty at the hands of man, the maximum of divine affliction, the ultimate in horror, that pity merges into rage and they revolt against fate, which to them seems to have exceeded both its rights and its laws.

Their ideas of justice, human and supernatural, are violated. Their faith in God is shaken. They mutter vague threats and blaspheme. They are inflamed with an impulse to destroy or to kill. They are maddened by their impotence and vent their feelings on little things or in violence against others, according to their temperaments.

Something of the sentiment of his companions penetrated to the dazed mind of Willetts. He seemed to have appreciated the facts if not the full intensity of the barbarity. And when those who could understand the child had translated the story for the others, his nature seemed to respond to it; for he went to the little sufferer and sat down mutely beside him, looking from the clean, white coverings of the tiny, crippled feet to the deer-like eyes of the babe and the vengeful faces of his comrades.

In a short time they had done here all that was possible. So one of them lifted the child gently upon his back and they found their way slowly by the starlight to the dim crest above. And when they had finished the rude meal of the camp and had fed the boy as best they could, telling his story in a dozen words, they lay down to sleep, though it was still early; for men who march and struggle in the heat of the tropics waste no part of the night in idle talk and play.

As for the child, he crawled to Willetts as to one akin to himself, crippled; and when the mists of the morning hours chilled the air, he nestled closely to the soldier and so slept until the dawn.

PERHAPS it was the infirmities of each that formed a bond between these two. However that may have been it was the recruit who carried the little one next day when they began the return to their station, and he brooked no relief nor interference except that he let another carry his encumbering arms and equipment. And so these two journeyed together, the wee waif astride the bowed back of the stricken white man, his great, brown eyes filled with sorrow and joy, wonder and peace; the other frowning, moved by an impulse he could not yet interpret.

Forty minutes of plodding and a rest of twenty was the order, and in that fashion they stepped off the miles doggedly, the sergeant at the head of the column, the corporal at the rear, and a "point" of one

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man well in advance. They were low-spirited that morning, disappointed and discouraged. There was an occasional jest of unusual keenness at which they laughed a little. But for the most part they forged their way in silence save for the rattle of tin cups and bayonets.

Only, Willetts sometimes muttered and babbled to himself, protesting now against the stillness and now against the noise of battle which he seemed to hear again. So he cast a gloom over all except the lad, who dozed contentedly upon his shoulder.

The sun was still low in the east when they joined the captain, who led the remainder of their company. And first the sergeant took Willetts to the surgeon who set the two incompetents apart with his own men and so ended the depressing influence they exercised. Then, shortly after the noonday rest, they set forth once more and reached their destination just as the red of sunset changed to a purple that seemed to flood the sea with wine.

They took the recruit and the child to the nipa hut they used for a hospital, and Sergeant Dyckman followed later to find out what he should write to Mary. Naturally he was depressed at the whole affair.

Quite unreasonably, though, he apostrophized Willetts peevishly for his spinelessness, himself for having detailed the youth upon the expedition and Mary for having thrust upon him the making of a man out of material that seemed to have no manhood in it. That Mary, forceful, sensible, capable of taking care of herself, should have annexed this useless lover, was humiliating.

"If she had wanted something to mother," he argued, "there's better stuff in any orphan asylum."

As a matter of fact, however, he was grumbling chiefly to conceal his own solicitude from himself. Anxiety, especially on account of others, is always harassing. But to try to overwhelm it with universally directed rebuke is as useless as throwing a blanket over a smudge. Knowledge of the fact and of the foolishness of it only aggravate the matter.

It was so with the sergeant. The more fault he found with himself and others, the more worried he became. And then, because he recognized the absurdity of his conduct, he sought excuse in sophistry and so plagued himself in a circle.

"And if the poor fool never'll be any good again," he complained, "it'll be just like the woman of her to want him more than ever and to slave for him all the rest of her days," which added to his concern and his indignation. For there is a little demon in the reasoning faculties who likes to provoke fire into flame and nags the intellect into a fighting mood against its own vagaries. And so, in a combination of tempers, the hurrying old man mutteringly encountered the surgeon.

"Sleep," said the doctor, "is a wonderful restorer, and just now both invalids are like the dead with it. To answer your question specifically, Sergeant, I should say that Willetts may be suffering only from severe mental shock. A few days in bed may be all that is necessary for him."

Whereupon the old soldier took himself off to his cot, somewhat comforted and as irrationally warm in heart toward all the world as he had before been bitter.

Indeed, Willetts was entirely himself again shortly afterward, though much of what had occurred was gone from his mind. But Sergeant Dyckman returned to the hospital one afternoon, and as he sat beside the other's bed he filled the gaps in the narrative. Willetts remembered the child's story, however, almost perfectly.

"And you mean to tell me," he asked, "that I went plumb nuts just from noise?"

"It wasn't the noise, exactly, my boy, it was fright. You were scared. You went loco from—well—out and out panic."

The recruit leaned back upon his pillow and thought awhile. Then he glanced at the cripple who lay asleep near them.

"When I look at that," he said, propping himself on his elbow once more, "it don't seem possible."

"What don't?"

Willetts jerked a thumb toward the foundling.

"That I could ever be afraid of creatures that would do a thing like that," he explained, gazing at the other half-angrily. "It don't, Sergeant, for a fact."

The old man smoothed his grizzled hair and studied Willetts shrewdly a moment.

"You were, though, and there's worse coming. It's going to take all your nerve even to go back to the comp'ny again. Do you realize that?"

The rooky did not reply immediately. He merely shifted a little on his bed.

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"What's the answer, Sergeant?" he asked at length. "Is that a warning not to be a boob as well as a coward, or are you just trying to prepare me for a hard jolt? Believe me, I know it's coming. I'll have to take my medicine, of course. Me, a white man, to funk on account of the devils that did that. Honest, Sergeant, I can't get over it. Let me get another crack at 'em, that's all!"

Sergeant Dyckman nodded comprehendingly, but he was somewhat perplexed none the less. It is hard to reconcile the weakling with the apostle militant of humanity. None curses cowardice so much as he who is conscious of it. Also it is to be expected that his remorse over failure will be extravagant if not hysterical.

Apparently Willetts was sincere in all he said, but that signified nothing. It is easy to be brave at a distance from the enemy. He would talk this way in any case; for realization, tenderheartedness and the will to do are independent of strength to perform.

Ordinarily the sergeant would have acknowledged the speech and have smiled knowingly to himself. But the tone was not like that of the boy who had crept to him on the hilltop. It was the voice of a man with a mission and sure to fulfil it, in complete realization of his own shortcomings and of what he must endure. It was soft, decisive, final. So the sergeant wondered and considered, as he sat there, now smiling a little in the wrinkles about his wise, keen eyes, and finally asked a question.

"Why don't you transfer to some other comp'ny or even out of the regiment, and start again where you aren't known?"

"Me? Put in for a transfer?"

"Sure. It would make it easier for you."

Willetts sat up resentfully, with his mouth twisted into a wry smile, and rubbed the short stubble upon his small, round chin.

"I know that I'm not wanted here any more, Sergeant, and I suppose it's all off with you as far as Mary is concerned. But I'm going to stay right here with this outfit until I get a shot at those butchers. After that the whole company can go to blazes as far as what they think of me goes. I don't blame them, you know, for feeling as they do, nor you either.

"But if the captain wants to get rid of me in the meantime, he'll have to work the transfer, not me. And say, Sergeant," he added as if to dismiss the whole subject, "put me down on the clothing requisition for a pair of tan shoes, will you? My others wore through on that last hike and my feet are still sore."

IN THE morning he was returned to duty, and that day and the next and many others went by without news of the raiders. What Willetts had to bear in that time was of a passive rather than an active nature. The majority looked upon him as a defective, tolerantly, and not as one to be reviled.

They were superior and kind. He was not one of themselves, simply with them. And he never went on guard but that the officer of the day considerately cautioned him to call the corporal if at any time of the day or night he did not "feel all right." In many ways, he was constantly reminded of their opinion of him. It was hard, but not so bad as he had expected.

It easily came about, therefore, that little Esteban, when at last he could get about, was his only companion. They spent many hours sitting together under the big mango tree in front of the barracks, exchanging Visayan and English; for there was hardly anything else they could do since Esteban could not hobble far at one time without falling, nor run at all. Yet they were good comrades because of the interest each felt in the other, and when they could make themselves understood they exchanged many confidences.

Frequently they discussed atrocities committed against *Americanistas* in general and the Godinez family in particular, and Willetts would devise many schemes for bringing the perpetrators to justice. To these the child would listen with his dark, shining eyes dilated in rapt attention, bobbing his head in sympathy or interposing juvenile but often wise objections to what appeared to him immovable obstacles.

At times his bright little face showed astonishment at his friend's ignorance of the ways of people who live in the hills, which, to him, seemed inexcusable in a grown-up, and that one a white man, too, who should know everything. And then Willetts would inquire and propound only to discover some insurmountable barrier himself, in the end. So all these came to naught.

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"But what I most want," said the child one day, "is first to have a priest bless the ground in which my parents are buried, and to say prayers over them. Yet the priest here hates the *Americanos*, too, and urges the *insurrectos* to kill them all and those who favor them. He is a bad priest. He is an *insurrecto* himself, you know, and brother to three generals. So he will not go, even for money, or he would take the money and say curses, and so what can we do?"

"We will find another."

"But no. None other can officiate here."

"And is it then so necessary, little one?"

The child looked up at him reproachfully.

"But you know," he replied. "Moreover, it is a charge my mother laid upon me."

There was a sense of finality to this that admitted no reply. Childhood makes of every one a partner in its cloudless faith. When it is based upon what is good, he who would sully it is less than human. To the child, any notion that Willetts could regard the fulfilment of the dead woman's command as aught but essential to the salvation of all concerned was preposterous.

As to one who could not doubt, the foundling looked to his friend to solve all difficulties. And Willetts, like many a better man, could not find it in his heart to argue in the face of such profound belief. So he merely nodded as if to accept all that was implied, and they sat silently together until the sunset which was not long afterward.

But some time after taps Willetts rose and dressed himself. Then he roused the little fellow, who slept beside him, and led him craftily through the shadows of the squad room out into the night.

To the wondering lad he said simply—

"We go to your parents."

The child, realizing that a big thing was afoot, retired into his native habit and made less sound than the leaves of their broad mango. He limped along with his hand upon his companion's rifle, and thus they came to the *padre's* house.

"Enter and bring him out," bade Willetts, and the child, after a little hesitancy, obeyed.

The priest was a slight, smiling native clad in a long, black gown, and he smirked and fawned upon the soldier most obsequiously. But Willetts directed him curtly to proceed before him.

To this the churchman objected; but Willetts ripped him across the haunches with the front sight of his piece, so that from refusing he set to begging for his hat. But Willetts denied him this also.

"I take no chances," he said. "*Adelante.* Proceed! To the place where this child lived. And you," to the boy, "tell me if he goes wrong."

"But I do not know this child."

"He is of your parish and you do know him. Go!"

Now the priest may have surmised that he was going to his own death or that his captor was mad. But he protested no more, relying, doubtless, upon his wits and cunning to be rid eventually of his embarrassments. A Krag, besides, in the hands of one who appears to mean what he says, is a powerful silencer. So he set forth docilely followed by the soldier with the babe upon his back, and soon entered the jungle by a narrow trail that Esteban certified was the shortest way.

It was cool there and very dark. The black foliage on both sides, heavy with moisture, slapped across their faces and drenched them with pattering showers of dew drops big as pearls. And then, as they emerged occasionally into a clearing, a white wraith of mist would rise from the ground and seem to move specterwise toward the pit-like opening of the trail beyond.

It was more fearsome there than in the tangled, sodden brush; for at any moment, in some such place, they were likely to fall in with a camp of cutthroats. A lizard scurrying out of their path, or a slow beetle in scratching flight, brought them tingling to a pause. And a tree that rubbed and squeaked against another fairly froze their blood. Yet the bobbing shaven spot of the placid priest moved on and on, and Willetts followed.

"Do you watch around us," he charged the boy, "and I will watch him."

"But sometimes I can not see for fear."

"As you can, then."

IN THIS fashion they traveled several miles, alive to every flicker of the bush and every sound, their nostrils tense, their muscles rigid with the imminence of danger. But the *padre* looked

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neither to the right nor left, indifferently calm as one at home.

Then they mounted into the high country which was rocky and more open, so that the moonlight betrayed them for long distances, and boulders of fantastic shapes, hunched beside the trail, were often so like the figures of squatting men that more than once their hearts fell within them.

At one time they passed close to a shack and the *padre* stumbled and made a noise.

"If you do that again," threatened Willetts, "I will kill you."

And later, not far from their destination, they approached another hut where there was still a light burning. Here the wily creature lurched against a low bough so that it broke and crackled. But he turned immediately, bowing and smilingly apologetic, thus disarming Willetts, in a way.

This time some one came out and gazed after them, then walked slowly down the trail instead of into his shelter, as Esteban told Willetts in a whisper.

"That is bad," he added. "There will be a number in wait for us until we return."

"It can not be helped, now," was Willetts' reply.

But he prodded the shuffling priest to make him hasten his short, easy gait, and quickened his own long, rhythmic strides, bending slightly beneath the weight of his burden, until at last their shadows fell across the crest of the mound above the broad rice fields and dissolved in the blackness of the plantains. From there it was but a step to the desolate hut in the grass below where the child had lain crying into the great, empty world.

"Here," said Willetts to the *padre*," you will stop and bless these graves and pray for these dead; and hereafter, if you curse them, you shall be damned with a greater curse than any you know. God is with this orphan. Begin!"

Under the ever-whirling sky, with the wet cogon dripping crisply around them, the priest performed his office while the child knelt and the soldier stood alert close behind. Word by word the mumbled Latin and the half-sung prayers were finished. One by one the rites were all performed. Everything was still once more save for a slight sobbing by the lad, the drop of the dew and the careless chirping of a cricket.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Willetts.

"*Si*, señor!"

"Is it right—according to form?"

"I know the words but not their meaning. Yet it sounds and looks as I have heard and seen before."

"Then let us return."

"But señor," complained the priest, "I am nearly dead with fatigue, and faint. Can we not rest a little?"

"No."

"I will say many masses for their souls if only I may rest a while."

"You will say them anyway, or take another journey, and the child shall be at the church to hear. We must give your friend back there as little time as possible. Move!"

The little fellow upon his back sighed resignedly as they started, and Willetts patted his tiny knee to show that he, too, understood. Few, indeed, dare enter the jungle with a hostile guide, and fewer get safely out. Yet they must go as they had come, though the way was even more frightful because of the villain who had gone ahead of them.

It was the boy who fortunately spied the ambush, not far from the end of their march, nicely planned to meet them with the rising sun. The *padre*, warned perhaps by a sign, suddenly quickened his slip-shod pace and started for the town, on the run. Willetts paused, just for a moment.

First he set down Esteban who scrambled into the grass. Then, roaring like a beast, he charged headlong into the thicket. Some he clubbed with his rifle. Others fled, and a few crept around behind to finish him, just as a searching party, attracted by his outcry and the sound of his shots, broke into the trail.

"Come on, you fellows!" he raged as they stopped amazed. "Have I got to do it all myself? What are you afraid of? They're nothing but vermin! Dirty, filthy vermin! Get after 'em!"

While he slept that day the foundling told the story and the captain decided that absence without leave might, on occasion, be overlooked even in time of war. As for Sergeant Dyckman, he retired to write another letter to Mary.

"But what did it?" he mused. "I dunno. Maybe, seeing how he's in love, the little gu-gu stirred up a sort of father feeling in him. And yet that don't account for all of it, either. Maybe it was a sort of big human feeling. I dunno."

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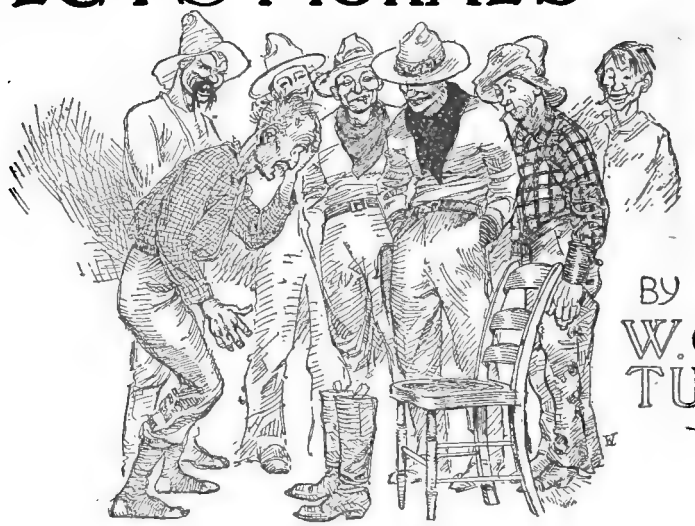
MULEY'S MORALS



BY W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "With the Joker Wild," "Upside Down or Backwards," etc.

"AND if I ever catches any uh you four Jaspers on the property of the Cross J I'm going to fill yuh full uh holes!"

That's uh pretty strong statement, but the old man was sore. Uh man says things in the heat uh anger that he don't always mean, but I reckon old man Whittaker meant every word.

Me and "Muley" Bowles, "Telescope" Tolliver and "Chuck" Warner sets there on our broncs, with our war-sacks tied to our cantles, and bows our heads to the inevitable.

"I don't like none of yuh!" yelps the old man. "If I can help it none uh you will get work on uh danged ranch this side of Chicago. Sabe?"

Muley recites, solemn like:

> "Speak not in anger, my old friend.
> Let not our friendship thusly end.
> Dig in thy soul for mercy meek.
> I hope yuh die before next week."

"Poetry!" explodes Whittaker, waving his rifle around his head. "Gol dingle dang! Git off my ranch. I'm sick uh poetry: sick uh banjo-playing, singing, chicken-stealing cowpunchers. Git off, gol dingle dang yuh, before I shoots yuh off!"

"Man the windlass and up anchor," orders Telescope. "No use in aggravating the old pelican, Muley. He ain't got no soul, and uh man without uh soul don't appreciate the nice things uh life. If he had anything in his heart except the greed uh gold I'd sing him uh sentimental ditty entitled——"

"You fellers going?" squeaks the old man. "I don't want no song—dang your hides! The weight uh your presence unbalances my land. Get uh going!"

We went. Without malice in our hearts and about eighty cents among us we went. Gump was to blame for our departure. Did yuh ever eat any gump? If yuh acquire the chicken by legitimate means it's just uh chicken stew, but if yuh steals the bird, it's gump. Ours was gump.

How was we to know that the old man sent East for them hens? We all been on the round-up for two weeks, and our first supper at the home ranch was uh crime. The cook had quit and some food murderer had taken the job. We wiggles through uh lot uh burnt stuff without receiving no nourishment, and our feelings ain't what you'd call joyous when we goes back to the bunk-house.

Muley feels so bad that he wanders off down to the barn. Said he went down to get uh feed uh oats, but pretty soon he comes back with uh grin on his fat face, and starts hunting around the bunk-house.

"Say, you fellers seen anything of that

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old five-gallon can what used to be around here?" he asks.

"Under my bunk," says Telescope. "What yuh want it for?"

"Listen," says Muley. "Down in the barn is uh box with three speckled hens in. Ain't that reason enough?"

It sure was. Chuck can stew uh chicken to the queen's taste, and we sets there and plays poker, with cards in one hand and chicken in the other.

The old man comes about the time we're picking the bones, and when he sees what we got he loses his voice. By the next morning he gets it back, and what he says to us is worth hearing. Seems like the old man must be getting childish, 'cause he informs us that he paid fifteen dollars each for them birds.

There ain't no chance to lie out of it, so Telescope tries to smooth things over, but the old coot acts like we had stewed his immediate fambly, and sends us away from his bed and board and threatens to inform the country of our misdeeds.

Telescope Tolliver is uh Kentuckian by instinct. He uses an accent that would lead yuh to believe that on one side of his fambly flows uh strain of P. Porter blood—P. standing for Pullman. His hat reposes a long ways from his heels, and he has uh soothing voice while singing.

Muley Bowles looks like uh corn-fed ham. He's so heavy that he has to have uh work-horse to ride. Any time he forks uh nine-hundred pound bronc said bronc's legs look like croquet wickets. Muley is the Poet Lariet of Yaller Rock County. He rimes all over. He's got uh sweet disposition and no conscience to speak of. His favorite saying is—

"There's ten years difference between suspicion and conviction."

He packs uh .38 outside his chaps and uh .45 underneath.

If Chuck Warner wasn't uh mistake uh nature at least he was an experiment. To look at Chuck, you'd say he was uh human being—nothing more. He looks like uh he-man with both feet in uh hole, on account of his short legs. He's got uh Roman-nosed face and utter disregard for the truth. He can wiggle his ears fluently enough to prove that at least one side of his family sprang from mules instead of monkeys.

I am Henry Clay Peck, Esq.—uh self-made man. I fingers uh banjo with expression and gusto, and when I raises my voice in song all nature seems to shut up. I've got uh proud spirit, and I'd uh done well in most anything except what I've tried to do.

"Out in this cold world alo-o-o-one,
Nothing but sorrow I se-e-e-e-e.
I am nobode-e-e-e-e-e's darling,
Nobody ca-hares for me-e-e-e-e."

Telescope Tolliver warbles, in uh sweet and sad voice, as we pilgrims off down the road toward Paradise. There's sorrow in our every action. Muley bobs his fat head, solemn like, and composes:

"Four souls with bellys full uh gump,
Four blackballed souls sent out to roam.
No place to drink except uh pump.
No money, friends, or happy home.

"Bring back the days uh yesteryear,
Days when our souls fit honest men,
Days when we had the price of beer.
Before we murdered that speckled hen."

"Old Whittaker sure is one stingy old pelican," agrees Chuck. "He don't admire uh dollar no more than I do my eyes. Dang his old hide—he's rich! He owns all the bank at Piperock and I reckon he owns the bank at Paradise, too. Tied uh can to four of the best punchers in the State just 'cause we ate up some hens. They was tough, too."

"Chuck, you told the truth for once in your life," declares Telescope. "I applauds your oration. While it shakes our faith in your veracity, we applauds your attitude."

"Do yuh mean to insinuate that I'm uh liar?" asks Chuck, and we enjoys our first laugh since we ate that stew.

"Uh few minutes ago I'd uh licked uh man what said yuh wasn't," laughs Telescope. "But since I've heard yuh tell the truth once I ain't so danged sure."

DID yuh ever hear of "Pole Cat" Perkins? Pole Cat is older than the Medicine Hills and crazier'n uh bedbug. He lives over in Whistler's Gulch in uh dugout, and spends his spare time trying to see how close he can come to starvation and still live. His side line is skunks. Honest to grandma.

He ain't what you'd designate as uh social leader, him having sort of uh smelly way about him that folks don't care for. He ain't in the business for gain, but for pleasure, and he's always got uh lot

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uh striped and black ones in his parlor.

We meets Pole Cat on the road.

"Howdy, Mister Perkins," says Telescope. "How's all the little skunks today?"

"Tol'able, Telescope, tol'able," admits Pole Cat, nodding uh face that looks like two eyeholes cut in uh bear-skin. "I just finds uh den with some danged nigh white ones in," he announces, happy like.

"What flavor?" asks Chuck, spurring his horse around on the windward side. "If it's the same as you're using we don't covet em."

"They don't smell bad," states Pole Cat. "Skunks don't smell bad."

"Well, you're not uh skunk then," states Chuck. "You sure do advertise."

We moseys off down the road and meets Bill McFee, our brave and unefficient sheriff. We exchanges some unpleasantness with Bill, and notices that he's packing uh hammer. We all remarks on how appropriate the utensil is.

"Bill," says Telescope, "you're beginning to get wise. Uh claw-hammer is one thing uh sheriff ought to carry. There's so danged many knockers around here that uh man ought to go heeled."

Bill spits past his bronc's ear and grins.

"Posting re-ward notices," he explains. "One time I does it with the butt of my six-gun and I shoots off uh toe, so I uses uh hammer now."

"Somebody been tempting justice?" asks Muley.

The sheriff hauls out uh piece uh paper about uh foot square, and hands it to Muley.

"'Uh thousand dollars reward for information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the person who robbed the Silver Bend Bank on September 7,'" reads Muley. "Ain't there no description to go on, Bill?"

Bill spits at the tip of his bronc's ear again and shakes his head.

"Nope. Ain't it funny? That cashier was there all the time. You know him, don't yuh—Frank Allen? Sure yuh do. He answered questions, and saw the man what done it, but all he can remember is the gun that the feller stuck in his face. I asks him if it was uh .38.

"'Thirty-eight!' he snorts. 'Why, Sheriff, it must uh been at least six inches in muzzle diameter.'"

"Well, Bill, I hopes yuh cash in on that thousand," says Chuck.

"He won't," states Muley. "If I wasn't so danged busy all the time I'd rob uh bank or two just for the experience."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars McFee. "Muley, uh man would have to be mighty scared if he didn't remember your description—you or Telescope or Chuck."

"Haw, haw, haw!" mimics Muley. "I wouldn't care if I was recognized and called by my first name if there wasn't nobody but you to go after me."

"Aw, don't argue with the law," advises Telescope. "Bill McFee was elected sheriff uh this county by the overwhelming majority uh six votes, so he must uh been the man for the place."

"How could he help getting elected?" snorts Muley. "Every danged cow rustler in the county voted for him."

"Then somebody lied to me, Muley," states McFee, shaking his hammer at Muley. "Somebody told me that I didn't get uh danged vote from the Cross J."

"If I had uh hammer I'd make yuh take back them insults," says I. "Not being heeled, we considers the source. Put up your weapon and cease your insults."

> "He was uh sheriff, brave and bold,
> And hunted outlaws far and wide.
> He rode uh bronc with spavined legs,
> And wore uh hammer at his side.
> He wore uh hammer, 'cause uh gun,
> Was something that he couldn't use,
> 'Cause all this sheriff ever killed
> Was half-uh-pint uh rotten booze."

recites Muley, with deep feeling and many gestures, and the Four Disgraces lopes off down the road, leaving Bill McFee speechless with indignation. He had often bragged that half-uh-pint was just one little drink for him.

"I don't see what we're going to Paradise for," complains Chuck, while we takes uh drink at Seeping Springs. "We ain't got enough money to buy uh stack uh whites or uh round uh drinks. Dang the luck! Why didn't we meet them hens before pay-day instead uh three days after?"

"Critical state of affairs," agrees Telescope. "I'd like to be lucky enough to hang uh rope on the feller what robbed that bank. I reckon uh thousand would look bad to us right now, eh?"

"While you're doing uh lot uh wishing, Telescope, yuh might wish that you was the feller what robbed the bank. He got five thousand, and it's uh cinch that they

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won't never catch him. Nobody ever gets caught unless it's in the act. Beats punching cows, if yuh asks me."

The four of us looks at each other, wise like, for uh minute, and then Telescope clears his throat and shakes his head:

"We're too unlucky. Why, we can't even steal hens without getting caught."

Muley sets there and peruses uh lot uh small pieces uh paper, and wrinkles his forehead uh heap.

"Won't she rime, Muley?" asks Chuck.

Muley shakes his head, and arranges the pieces different.

"There!" he snorts. "She's readable but not intelligible. Listen and see if this sounds like anything: 3 to L—21. R 17. L 55. R to O. Window. Use dynamite after. Tonight, sure."

"Sounds like uh prescription that old Doc Milliken gave me for rheumatism once," remarks Telescope. "Where'd yuh find it, Muley?"

"Right here on the ground. Somebody must uh tore it up when they stops for uh drink."

He puts the pieces in his pocket, and we pilgrims on. We enters Paradise and ties our broncs to the rack in front uh Mike Pelly's place. Inside is gaiety and laughter, as more fortunate punchers than we imbibes the juice that steals away wise men's brains, and tries to beat uh game that was invented for no such uh thing.

We manages to spear uh drink or two, and then sets down on the steps and consoles each other with the knowledge that nobody can say that we came to town and got drunk as usual.

Muley recites, "Lips that touch liquor can never touch mine," and the four of us renders the chorus from, "Drink to Me only with Thy Eyes."

Bill McFee rides into town, and goes over to the bank, but he don't speak to us as he rides past.

"Bill's likely gone over to caution Frank Allen not to get held up," remarks Telescope. "Or maybe he's going to post another notice where uh bank robber can't help seeing it."

"Bill ought to catch him if anybody could," opines Chuck. "You know the old saying, 'Set uh thief to catch one.' Bill's name used to be White down in Rosebud."

Muley nods his head, and fumbles in his pocket.

"Maybe. I knowed uh preacher what got hung for rustling. Yuh never can tell which way uh pickle is going to squirt. Wish I had enough to buy uh stack uh chips."

JUST about that time old man Whittaker and Hank Padden, who owns the Seven A outfit, rides into town in uh buckboard. They enters the saloon long enough to have uh drink, and then Hank comes out and starts across the street.

"I'm going to strike Hank for uh job," announces Telescope.

He hails Hank, and they has uh little talk out there in the street. Pretty soon Telescope comes back; and we can see he's sore.

"What did he do—make yuh foreman?" grins Chuck.

"He made me —— mad!" snaps Telescope. "That's the first time uh descendant of the Kentucky Tollivers has ever been stigmatized, and my gorge ariseth higher than Mount McKinley."

"I should think so," consoles Muley. "Dog-gone, it sure must be uh awful thing to come up on uh man. I've knowed yuh to get paralyzed, Telescope, but stig—oh, that's terrible! How'd he do it?"

"He cast uh cloud upon my character. I asks him for uh measly job uh punching cows, and he informs me that I got to get uh letter uh recommendation from the last place I worked."

"All is lost!" wails Chuck, wiggling his ears. "Old man Whittaker can't write 'cause he hurt his hand yesterday."

"Can't yuh imagine that old pelican giving us uh recommend to anybody?" asks Muley.

"I know about what he told Hank," states Chuck. "He just about told him that we ain't to be trusted—blast his old hide! I hope he gets robbed! I hope he gets——"

"You hope he gets what?" asks Telescope.

"Muley, let me have them pieces uh paper yuh found," says Chuck.

Muley hands 'em over, and Chuck copies 'em off on another sheet.

"What's the main idea?" I asks, but Chuck merely grins and rolls uh fresh smoke.

Pretty soon Weinie Lopp and "Swede"

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Johnson, of the Seven A, rides in and asks us to have uh drink. After uh couple uh rounds it transpires that Swede owes Muley seven dollars, and he pays up. Muley, immediate and soon, weaves over to the wheel, lets her ride twice and comes back wealthy—according to our late standards uh wealth.

Old Doc Milliken enters our midst, and we welcomes him to the fambly circle. Doc is uh funny old coot. Him and Chuck are good friends, and they has uh confidential talk. The doc shakes his head uh few times at what Chuck is telling him, but after a while he seems to agree, and they goes outside.

Me and Muley hooks up in uh game uh pool, and when we gets through we misses Telescope. We worries not, and calls for more cheer.

"I feels romantic this eve," states Muley, to Abe Smith, the bartender. "Did yuh ever feel romantic, Abe?"

"How so, Muley?" asks Abe, and then Muley recited:

"I feels like uh knight of old.
I'd like to wear iron duds.
I'd carry uh sack uh gold,
When I went to uh tavern for suds.
I'd carry uh ten-foot spear,
At the head of some real live men,
I'd ride into war with uh cheer——"

"And kill off uh speckled hen," finishes old man Whittaker, who has just come in with Bill McFee. "How's that for uh rime, eh?"

I can see that the old man has been dallying with the laughing water.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Bill. "That's good, old-timer. You sure can poet uh plenty. Now, if you could only stake——"

"*Swish—Blam!*"

Muley has stooped over when Bill begins his oration, and he stands up with uh tin cuspidor in his hand. It was the neatest billiard I ever seen. The side uh that tin utensil glances off the side of old man Whittaker's head and takes the place of uh hat on Bill McFee's head, where it spins several times before coming to rest. The place seems to become noisy right away, so me and Muley starts for the door.

Mike Pelly has put uh long looking-glass in front of his door, and we never noticed it before, so we meets Mister Peck and Mister Bowles face to face. Seems funny to meet yourself thataway when you're in uh hurry, and ain't got time to stop and talk. We bumps into ourselves, apologizes, and then goes around. Old man Whittaker makes uh grab at me and I hits him so hard he tries to make both ends meet.

"Stop! Gol darn yuh!" whoops McFee in Muley's ear.

Bill's got that cuspidor hanging careless like over one ear, and he shoves that hammer into Muley's face.

"Shoot, yuh coward!" howls Muley. "I dare yuh to shoot me. Yuh ain't got uh nail in it."

McFee takes his eyes off Muley to stare at that hammer, and Muley slams both of his big fists down on Bill's tin head-covering, and Bill sets down on the floor in time to block old man Whittaker's rush.

The last we seen of the mix-up showed McFee setting there on the floor, with that cuspidor over his face, pecking away at Whittaker's vertebræ with that hammer.

Me and Muley leans against the hitch-rack and cries to our heart's content. It's dark as Egypt out there at the rack. Finally Muley stops sobbing and puts his arms around my neck.

"Hen," says he, "that's the firsht time I ever was assaulted by uh carpenter. Don't yuh think that Bill looks stylish in uh spittoon? Loo' out, Hennery! Here comes the bad man with his nail-puller."

Bill McFee weaves out on the porch, and the old man is with him. Behind them comes several innocent bystanders.

"Who turned my bronc around?" asks Muley, complaining like.

I was going to ask the same thing, but why ask questions at uh time like this? I knows my own bronc and saddle, so I rolls aboard and jams the steel into the animile.

Did we go ahead? We did not! I never saw uh bronc go backward the way mine did. I'm just about to get hysterical when I finds that Muley is beside me, pounding along and cussing uh streak.

"Reverse!" he yelps. "Turn around, you son-of-uh-gun—you!"

"Same here!" I yells. "What's going on here? Whoa!"

I starts pulling in on my reins. I pulled and pulled, and keep on taking up the slack until I feels the headstall, and then I gets—hair!

Wow! That bronc seems to rise up in front, and I never got throwed so far in

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my whole life—backward, too. I gets three glimpses of the stars, so I'd opine that I turns over three times, and then I enters the bosom of uh mesquite fambly.

I don't know how long I stayed there, but I feels that I'm acquainted with each and every branch of the fambly when I tears my way loose and takes inventory.

I ain't got no hat and I'm shy one sleeve. I'm ahead one black eye, three cactus and one sprained thumb.

I sets down on the edge of the road and tries to collect my thoughts and enough loose tobacco for uh smoke, when I hears uh musical conversation down the road.

"All thish worl' is shad and dre-e-e-e-ery everywhere I—whoo, hoo! Hennery! Oh, Hen! O-o-o-o-o, darkies, how my heart grows we-e-e-ery—Hen-n-n-n-nry Peck! If you're dead speak."

"I ain't dead but I'm speechless," says I. "Are you dead, Muley?"

"I am," says he. "I'm deader'n ——! Killed in action."

"Back action, too," says I. "What caused the phenomenon, Muley?"

"If I had uh word like that in my system I'd ruin my soul trying to find something to rime with it," he states, painful like, setting down beside me. "If you wants to know in United States language what caused it I'll close with these few well chosen words: Some danged comedian, with murder in his heart, put our saddles on backward, and we never noticed it. Sabe?"

"That's what I thought," says I. "If I'd uh——"

"There ain't no use uh wailing of the things that might uh been,
If we hadn't lost our happy home through stealing of uh hen.
Or busting up uh sheriff with uh cuspidor so bright,
Or riding broncos backward in the stillness of the night.
I't ain't the things yuh might have done that makes yuh sad and sore,
It's the things yuh didn't mean to do hangs crêpe upon your door."

recites Muley, with proper feeling and expressive gestures.

"I ain't excusing myself for what I've done, Hen," he explains. "I got uh poetical temperament. If I had uh rough nature like Telescope and Chuck and—say, Hen, I'll bet uh thousand dollars that Telescope and Chuck changed them saddles."

"I'll take that bet, Muley," says I. "Not because I don't agree with you, but because I'm uh sport. I'll raise yuh fifteen cents in money."

"Table stakes, Hen. Table stakes. That thousand taps me. What yuh got?"

"I got three cactus and uh sprained thumb."

"Yes, and yuh drew the ace uh spades," says he, lighting uh match, and gazing at my eye. "You win, Hennery. Now that I'm broke we might as well walk back to Paradise."

WE DIDN'T have more than half uh mile to walk, but I don't see how we ever rode that far backward. We sets down across the street from the saloon and looks things over. We hears Bill McFee talking loud and unhandsome, so we stays there in spite of the draft. After a while we observes Bill buy uh bottle uh hooch, and then come out and start up the street.

"Let's have some fun," whispers Muley. "Let's hold Bill up and take that bottle. He ain't got nothing to shoot with except that hammer."

"I'll do it," I agrees. "I ain't never been shot with uh hammer, and the experience will be good for me."

Bill walks faster than we do, so we gives up the chase. We stands out there and watches Bill disappear in the dark, and as our thirst grows stronger our hearts beat in unison and we loses all fear. Says Muley—

"Mister Peck, will yuh have uh drink?"

"I will."

"Lend me your filthy wealth, Mister Peck," and I did—thirty-five cents.

We goes back to Mike's place and leans against the bar. Old man Whittaker and Abe Smith are the only ones there, and the old man is telling Abe all about it.

"Bill will get 'em," states the old pelican, wise like. "Bill's clever—yuh know it? Yessir. Besht sheriff we ever had. No danger uh robbers while Bill's on the job. No sir. Bill says to me, says he: 'I'm shuspishus uh them four punchers you got working for you. I shuspects 'em uh dark deeds. Sabe?'"

" 'I'm shuspishus of 'em, too, Bill,' says I. 'I mean it, too, Abe—gol dingle dang 'em! Know what they done, eh? Know what they done? I'm honesht cow man, and

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wrong don't right nobody—nobody. As long as uh man does his work right I shay, live and let——' "

The old man's head keeps getting lower and lower and he begins to snore like uh Piegan.

"Considerate old coot," opines Muley. "I'm glad he thought enough about us to get 'shuspishus'. Bartender, we wouldst glance upon the wine when it is red."

Abe sets out the bottles, and sizes up our appearance.

"Bill found yuh, did he?" he grins.

"Bill ——!" snorts Muley. "That cross between uh carpenter and uh cuspidor rack couldn't find his way home. We're just showing the effects uh general wear and tear."

"Bes' li'l sheriff we ever had," announces the old man, between snores. "Feel shuspishus—says I, and then Bill shez—*snr-r-r.*"

"Bill left his hammer," states Abe, pointing at it on the end of the bar. "He's pretty sore about that cuspidor. Haw! Haw! Haw! Him and the old man had quite uh time together on the floor. He hit the old man all along his backbone and then the old man got the hammer away from him and he hit that cuspidor that was on Bill's head so hard that Bill couldn't hear for ten minutes. Them tin things sure do ring some."

"What's got into the old man?" asks Muley. "He ain't in the habit uh hanging around town thisaway."

"He's uh banker now," states Abe. "After that bank gets robbed down at Silver Bend, Frank Allen, the cashier, feels that the folks down there blames him. Sabe? Old man Whittaker owns part uh that bank, too, so he asks Allen to come up here and run this one. Yesterday Allen gets word that his father is uh heap sick, so he leaves this afternoon. Uh course it was sudden like, and there ain't nobody to run the place, so the old man is going to run it himself. Sabe?"

"Uh-huh," agrees Muley. "He'll sure be in shape to figure interest tomorrow. As uh business man he'd be uh dandy post-hole digger. He canned the four of us because we killed three hens uh his."

"I know he's sore at yuh," admits Abe. "Him and McFee. Bill admits that none uh you four could have held up that Silver Bend bank, but he's got to suspect somebody. Yuh got to give him credit for having suspicions of somebody."

"Uh-huh," admits Muley. "I'm sorry I hit him with that cuspidor, Abe. Honest I am. I wish it had been an ax."

"What time is it, Abe?" I asks, and he informs us that it is ten o'clock.

"We got to get something to ride, and go after our broncs," I says to Muley. "Them nut-headed pieces uh coyote bait will just about ruin them saddles. Where can we get some horses, Abe?"

Abe shakes his head.

"I don't know. The old man has got uh pair hitched to his buckboard out back. Darn old wood-rat never even unhitched, and he expects to be here for uh week."

"Long ash uh man does his work half-way deshunt I shay—*r-r-rl.*" announces the old man, and then goes back to sleep.

"That's quite an intelligent conversation for him," states Muley. "He's been reading classical stuff. Let's go out and look at them broncs, Hen. Maybe we can use 'em."

It's uh pair uh roans what ain't never been saddled, and me and Muley don't feel like pulling off no more exhibitions.

"Let's see what we can find at the racks," says Muley, and when we goes around the corner we meets Telescope and Chuck.

"Where you fellers been?" asks Muley. "Fine friends, you are. I came danged near being shot with uh hammer. Also we don't care to face south on uh bronc what's going north."

"I told yuh it wouldn't work, Chuck," laughs Telescope.

"What you fellers packing?" I asks, noticing that they both got something under their arms.

"*Sh-h-h-hl*" whispers Telescope. "It's uh king's ransom. We're going to put it in the old man's buckboard."

"He don't need uh ransom," states Muley. "If yuh wants to do him uh favor, hang around uh few hours and get him some coffee. He sure is polluted."

"I'd love uh snort uh cawn juice myself," admits Telescope. "Ain't you got no money left, Muley?"

"Nope. You fellers wait uh minute: maybe I can stand Abe off for some."

Muley comes right back with uh bottle.

"Stand him off?" asks Telescope.

"I don't know," says Muley. "He

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wasn't there. I don't suppose he'll care if I pay for it some time."

"Friend uh my youth," gurgles Telescope. "I need thee every hour. What time is it, Hen?"

"Must be uh quarter after ten."

"Better go, hadn't we, Chuck?" asks Telescope.

Chuck wipes his lips and lights uh cigaret.

"Uh-huh. Muley, if you and Hen go with us yuh got to be danged quiet. Sabe?"

"Where yuh going—hunting?"

"Ke-rect," admits Chuck. "We're——"

"Say, Chuck, what you got on your person?" asks Muley. "My cripes! Don't you never take uh bath?"

"I don't smell nothing," sniffs Chuck.

"You couldn't. Not with that odor around yuh. Well, Telescope, lead us to the game.

> Lead us in silence through the night,
> Thou ransomer of kings.
> Thou who seems uh man on sight,
> And smells of many things.
> Changer of saddles, thou slender one,
> Drinker of juices of corn,
> If you're playing uh joke, you son-ot-uh-gun,
> You'll wish that you never was born.

There's uh danged sight more truth than poetry in that, Telescope."

"Poetry!" snorts Telescope. "While you sits around trying to rime words me and Chuck's been doing something useful as well as ornamental, ain't we, Chuck?"

"It must uh died on yuh," opines Muley. "I wish I had some Limburger cheese. We'd match them two smells and have uh great battle. Lead on, Mister Tolliver, of Kentucky."

TELESCOPE pilots us up the street and leads us behind the woodpile near the bank.

"Set down," he orders. "Now, dog-gone yuh, keep quiet! Just keep on the watch and don't talk. Muley, if you attempts to light that cigaret I'll assassinate yuh!"

"What are we to watch?" I asks.

"Anything yuh see," he replies, so we sets there in silence and wishes for uh smoke.

"I see the Big Dipper," announces Muley. "Twinkle, twingle little——"

"Shut up!" hisses Telescope. "Muley, are you going to keep still?"

"Aw ——!" groans Muley, disgusted like. "What kind of uh game is this?"

"Somebody's going to rob the bank this evening—we think."

"And we'll take it away from 'em when they comes out, eh?" chuckles Muley. "Here's where we get even with Whittaker. How do yuh know it's going to be robbed?"

"It's been robbed once," states Chuck. "We have hopes it will be again."

"Who—who robbed it?" stutters Muley.

"Me and Telescope."

"You — and — Telescope?" wonders Muley, aloud, and Telescope grabs him by the neck. "Let go, Telescope! Dog-gone, you can't blame uh feller for talking out loud in church under them circumstances. What was the matter—didn't yuh get it all?"

"You danged fool!" whispers Telescope. "We don't want the bank's money. We're after the reward. Sabe?"

"I'd admire to know how yuh robbed that bank," opines Muley. "Ain't they got no safe and ain't the door locked?"

"You remember that paper yuh found at the Seeping Springs?" asks Chuck, in uh whisper. "Some danged fool tore up his instructions and left 'em laying loose like. Them figures was the combination to the safe, and the window over there was unlocked. Sabe?"

"Well," says Muley, "let's take the money and be on our way. What's the use uh watching some poor devil get disappointed."

"Muley, if you had any sense—keep down!" hisses Telescope.

We strains our eyes and sees the figure of uh man slip around the corner of the bank. He stops there for uh minute and then slips up under the window. He puts something up against the side of the building, and we hears the window squeak a little as it goes up. Telescope gets up and sneaks toward the window, and we're right behind him. We stops under the window and listens.

"What you got in your hand—uh gun?" asks Telescope.

"No-o-o-o. Uh hammer," answers Muley. "Bill McFee's weapon."

"Got uh nail?" asks Telescope.

Muley fumbles in his pocket for uh minute and then we hears Telescope give uh joyful grunt. He stretches his long carcass up to the window-sill, reaches up and slides that window shut, without uh

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sound. Sudden like we hears uh yelp inside, and Telescope gets busy with that hammer: *Thump, thump, thump!*

Then he drops back with uh whoop—

"Nailed in—dog-gone my soul!"

There's something going on in that bank. We hears the plunk of uh six-shooter and considerable yelling.

"Watch that window!" yells Telescope, and then he runs out to the street and empties his gun in the air.

Muley gets excited and empties his, too, and by that time the population of Paradise begins to manifest themselves. I hauls out my old .41 and celebrates, too. You never heard so much conversation in your life. Everybody asks questions and don't wait for answers.

"Somebody go after the sheriff!" yells Telescope. "Somebody get the keys to the bank."

"Old man Whittaker's got the keys," somebody yells.

"I'll get 'em," states Muley. "Give me back that hammer, Telescope."

We surrounds the place, and I reckon there's more guns in sight than there was at the battle of Bull Run. I swells my chest and answers questions until I'm as dry as uh herring lunch in Death Valley. Pretty soon Muley comes back.

"Got 'em," he puffs. "The old coot was sound asleep."

Just then Hank Padden squirms his way through the crowd and comes up to us. He must uh been asleep in the hotel, 'cause he ain't wearing much except his belt and gun.

"Boys," says he, "I'll do the unlocking. Whittaker is uh friend uh mine and he trusts me."

He capitalizes the personal pronoun. Telescope grins and hands the keys over to him.

"Somebody is inside," he announces, just like it was news to uh crowd what had been talking about it for ten minutes. "I don't think they'll make any fight, 'cause we've got 'em dead to rights. About five uh you fellers with guns come up here. When I unlocks the door, drop down and go in low. Sabe? If they shoots at all it will be over our heads. Don't shoot unless yuh have to. Now, all ready!"

He turns the key in the lock, flings the door open, and them six trusting souls crawls right into that bank as fast as they can—and comes right back out uh danged sight faster than possible.

"Oh-h-h-h-h, my ——!" wails Telescope on my shoulder, and I can feel the sobs convulse his long carcass. "Oh-h-h-h-h-h! Haw! Haw! Haw-w-w-w-w-w! Mamma mine!"

I gets my first whiff, and believe me it would knock the tinsel off uh Christmas-tree. The crowd melts with the one exclamation—

"*Skunks!*"

Something hits me on the ankle, and I looks down at Chuck. He's got his arms wrapped around his stummick and he's rolling over and over on the ground. Telescope slips off my shoulder and joins Chuck, and they both chokes to death.

Hank Padden comes weaving past, and in the dim light his face looks the color of alkali, and he favors his stummick with every step.

The crowd stands off to one side, out of the draft, and watches the door. Sudden like uh figure comes weaving out of the door, stands for uh moment on the steps and then tumbles off into the dirt. It's the bold, bad robber. We stands at uh respectful distance and tries to decipher its identity. Pretty soon he gets up, and the crowd splits to let him through, and he wanders right down the street, exuding odors that would paralyze uh coddling moth. Nobody wants to capture him—nobody! When he gets down where there is uh little light we recognizes—Bill McFee.

He don't seem to know where he's going, but he's having one odorous time.

"Why don't somebody capture him?" yells Mike Pelly, and somebody yells right back:

"Yes, why? Go catch him, Mike."

"Not for uh million!" yelps Mike, and as Bill weaves toward the saloon he yells: "Not in here, Bill! Left face! Git out-t-t-t!"

Bill had no destination. He pokes right off down the street, and out into the lonely desert, and we bids him adieu.

"Let him go," yells somebody in the crowd. "Maybe by the time he's freshened up uh little there'll be uh reward offered."

That starts uh laugh, and then the conversation starts again. Everybody speaks of smells, everybody smells, and we all hankers for uh drink.

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WE INVADES Mike's place and finds old man Whittaker still asleep in the chair. Swede Johnson goes over and shakes him hard.

"He ought to know that he came danged near getting robbed," apologizes Swede. "Wake up, old-timer! By golly, he sure is one snoozer."

"Here," yells Abe Smith, handing a bottle across the bar. "Stick this under his nose and he'll wake up."

Uh course Swede has to try it on himself, and it raises his hat up about six inches. It's oil uh mustard. He shoves it under the old man's nose. The old man's head bobs for uh few seconds, and then he raises right up and proclaims:

"Bill's clever—yuh know it? Bes' li'l sheriff we ever had. He says to me, says he—uh—uh—say, what in —— is goin' on around here?"

"Bill is clever, all right, old-timer," agrees Weinie Lopp. "He tried to rob your bank. Sabe?"

The old man looks around, foolish like, and shakes his head to clear the alcohol.

"Say that again," he mumbles. "I must uh been sleeping."

He got information in big gobs right there. He knowed more about it than we did when they gets through. He listens, sort uh dazed like, and keeps nodding his head.

"Well, what do yuh know about that!" he snorts. "Skunks, eh? I'll have to investigate and——"

He starts to take uh step, and uh queer look comes over his face. He tries it again and then flops down in his chair.

"What's the matter?" asks Mike.

"Paralyzed!" wails the old man. "Can't move my feet! Doctor told me years ago not to drink hooch. Gol dingle dang the luck! Paralyzed! Might as well be dead."

"Creeping paralysis?" asks Abe.

"Creeping ——!" he snorts. "Who wants to creep? I want to walk!"

"Paralysis is one awful thing to come upon uh man," states Muley. "I've knowed men who got so bad with it that they can't move uh muscle. It just gradually gets worse and worse until it gets to their hearts and then they joins the angel band."

"Aw ——!" wails the old man. "What for kind of uh way is that to talk to uh man what is as sick as I am? Say something cheerful or keep your danged mouth shut. Won't somebody send for Doc Milliken? I'm sicker'n ——!"

"He can't do nothing for yuh," consoles Muley. "I'll bet I know more about your kind uh paralysis than he does. I ain't no graduate of uh skeleton school, but I sure does sabe your case, old-timer."

"Well, do something then!" howls the old man. "I can feel it coming up higher and higher all the time. I hates to ask yuh for help, Muley, but uh drowndin' man can't pick and choose his straws. Do something for me and name your own price."

"You hear him, everybody?" asks Muley. "He says for me to name my price. If I'll cure yuh will yuh give the four of us our jobs back and raise us from forty to seventy-five uh month?"

"My ——!" he howls. "I said I'd agree to anything, didn't I? Go ahead."

"Stand up," orders Muley, and when he wobbles to his feet, Muley walks right around behind him, takes hold under the old man's arms and lifts him right out of his boots. The boots stayed there. The old man shuffles his feet, careful like, and then reaches for uh boot. It sticks to the floor.

"Nailed down!" gasps the old man.

"Uh-huh," agrees Muley. "I took your feet out, nailed the boots down and put your feet back inside. Let this be uh temperance lesson to you, old-timer."

"Temperance," yelps the old man, dancing around in his socks. "Fine time to preach temperance just after I agrees to pay seventy-five dollars uh month to four punchers what would drive uh wooden Injun to drink."

Just then in comes Hank Padden, and steers straight for the old man.

"Whittaker, your bank has been robbed!" he exclaims.

"Again?" asks the old man, sort uh grinning.

"We chased them animiles out, and finds the safe door wide open. There ain't uh thing left inside."

"Is them two iron boxes gone?" gasps the old man, and Hank nods.

"Ain't that hard luck?" appeals the old man. "It ain't the cost of the danged things—it's the principle of the thing. First, I pays fifteen dollars each for three speckled hens and my hired help assassinates 'em. Today I receives four dozen

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fancy aigs to set under them hens, and now they're gone. Gol dingle dang!"

"Aigs!" yelps Chuck. "Did you have aigs in that safe?"

"Uh-huh," grunts the old man. "Four dozen. I never gets drunk unprepared. When Frank Allen left I cached the money in that woodpile beside the bank, and I put them aigs in the safe."

I leads Chuck off to one side, and looks foolish like at him.

"Chuck," says I, "I'd admire to find out uh few things."

"She was uh joke, Hen. We wanted to get even with the old man for acting the way he did. Sabe? Me and Telescope intends to perfume the bank, so we borrow chloroform from Doc Milliken and the animiles from Pole Cat Perkins. I gets to thinking about that piece uh paper that Muley finds, and when we found the bank window unlocked it was uh cinch. Them figures was the combination to the safe. We puts two striped ones inside and shut the door almost tight. They didn't take long to wake up."

"But the aigs?" I asks.

"Uh king's ransom, Hen," snickers Chuck. "They're out there in the buckboard."

"Ain't yuh going to catch Bill and prosecute him?" we hears Mike ask.

"Nope."

The old man shakes his head, slow like, and sniffs audibly.

"Nope. Not me. He don't require prosecution—he needs disinfecting. Him and Frank Allen, I reckon, pulled off that Silver Bend stunt, and that's why I give Frank this job. The way I figures it out is like this: Allen got the money at Silver Bend and Bill was to get what was up here. Allen is right now in jail at Great Falls and Bill is out there in the desert wishing to —— that he didn't have uh nose."

"Haw!" says Telescope, vacant like, and the old man grins at us.

"Boys," says he, "yuh might as well take my buckboard and go back to the ranch, and start trying to earn that swollen salary yuh horned out uh me—gol dingle dang your souls! I fired that cook but I'll get one as soon as I can."

"Who'll do the cooking for us?" asks Telescope.

"You can get your own breakfast, can't yuh? Can't yuh even fry aigs?"

"Is there any aigs on the ranch?" asks Muley.

"There will be when you get there," grins the old man.

"You sure are one wise hombre," applauds Telescope. "We got to hand it to you for being uh wise person."

"You can hand it to me for being uh danged fool! If I'd uh been wise I'd uh killed all four of yuh this morning. Sabe? Get on that buckboard and go home! What do yuh think I'm paying yuh so well for? Obey your boss!"

Me and Muley gets in that old rattletrap, and jingles and squeaks out of Paradise, and beside us rides Telescope and Chuck. Telescope raises his voice in song:

"Oh-h-h-h, it's getting mighty late and it's getting mighty cold,
And the long-horn cattle are uh getting mighty old,
With uh hi-yi and uh hi-yi and uh hi-yi yippi i aye."

"Whoa," says Muley, pulling up that pair uh broncs. "Listen to uh moral as she's revealed to old man Bowles's son Muley."

He rests his feet on the top of uh front wheel and recites thusly:

"No matter what temptation comes uh creeping in your mind.
No matter if another's gold plumb turns your morals blind.
It may be uh cinch to steal it, and your fingers simply itch.
All yuh got to do is grab it: here's your one chance to get rich.
Stop uh while and think it over ere yuh put your soul in pawn.
What was rosy wealth this evening may be rotten aigs at dawn."

"You got uh lot uh morals, Muley," agrees Telescope. "You're like uh coyote I saw once what wouldn't kill calves. He was in uh taxidermist's window."

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TIMOTHY'S NAUTICAL SCOOP

BY CAPTAIN A.E DINGLE

Author of "The Avenging Sea," "Out of the Wreck," etc.

"HAUL down the jibs! Ready the starb'd anchor—let-go!"

The skipper of the weather-battered schooner *Brosy Lass* ground the helm down until the vessel shook head to wind, then, with the roaring crash of the cable, sprang to the main halyards and let the great mains'l down by the run.

Outside, the sea and wind howled in rising chorus; even in the tiny haven she had made the schooner almost tore her bows out before she brought up on her anchor. But haven it was, in the lee of fairly high land; and, nestling under the darkening loom of the shore, lights twinkled invitingly to sea-weary mariners.

Besides, somewhere beyond the harbor a small, low-powered, but persistent sea policeman in the shape of an English gunboat carried double lookouts for the vanished *Brosy Lass*.

"Fooled the bulldog again!" guffawed the skipper, as the mate and small crew trooped aft to furl the mains'l. "Gold lace and shiny sextant navigators is all right for opening canals or making a big harbor look pretty with a mess o' flags, but they ain't one-two with an old sea-fox in these seas."

"Maybe you're right," grumbled the mate, hauling taut what had been in sailing the lee-lift. "Hope so, anyway, or I've worked like a galley slave six months for nothing. But this fellow ain't let up on us now in a thousand mile o' sailing, Skipper. He'll be waiting outside for us when this breeze lets us out."

"Oh, shut your head!" the skipper snapped savagely. "You give me the blue creevils with your weeping. I haven't come into a trap like this without knowing the way out. The bulldog daren't follow us in as long as the weather holds dirty. She draws too much water. And she don't know the northern entrance at all; it ain't on the charts.

"Let the men get their supper. Then you get yours, and we'll pull ashore and hire a couple of good boat-crews to tow us around inside the reef. While the navy's steamboat's keeping watch for us to sneak out the way we came in, we'll be over the horizon Batavia-bound with two reefs down."

The skipper turned to go below, and forcibly collided with a weedy, shambling youth who had been listening with gaping mouth. At each mention of the lurking warship a shivering fit shook the ungainly body from towseled head to bare, bunioned feet, and the clumsy hands, which were supposed to be helping to pass the stops about the mains'l aimlessly pawed the air.

With a contemptuous oath, the skipper struck him viciously with clenched fist, hurling him into the knot of seamen, who took up the hammering.

"Get for'ard, 'fore I kick yer keel through yer truck!" was the skipper's delicate advice. "Carry the men's supper along, and keep them donkey's ears folded up when

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I'm talking ship's business. Git, now, before I hit you properly!"

Timothy Clegg, a square peg in a round hole if ever there was one, scrambled forward with his arms wound about his head for protection. He blubbered as he ran.

His capacity for weeping had got him many a beating in the ship; men hammered him simply for the sport the resultant tears afforded them; but if they had been men of more discernment they might have seen in those tears the perilously thin dividing line between a hard-driven weakling and an aroused demon of revenge that no puny body could fetter.

Timothy had deserted from a warship in Singapore. Imbued with the idea that he was cut out for an admiral, yet lacking everything that goes to make a fighting seaman—influence, wealthy parents, or the physical fitness to enter by the hawse-pipes and hammer his own way up—he still refused to be discouraged. Having, as a boy, soaked in great volumes of nautical fiction of the "Cabin Boy to Commodore" type, he saw his way clearly.

He had joined the navy as a warrant officers' steward, a "vinegar caterer" he was contemptuously termed, and from the day of his entry his hours were devoted to day-dreams of his future magnificence.

Puny in body, and not too clean in person, lacking the bubbling youthful vigor that makes body bathing a tingling pleasure, his work as a table servant left a lot to be desired. More kicks than kopecks came his way, for his personal slovenliness was reflected in his service.

Added to his inefficiency as a servant, he started too soon on his upward climb; when he should have been studying ways and means of tastefully dishing up service rations for his lords and masters of the mess, he was frequently discovered in some dim corner with his long nose deeply buried in a surreptitiously acquired nautical epitome or a treatise on compass adjustment.

The avidity he showed in his study evinced a capacity for mathematics that should have carried him far in more legitimate directions; but hungry warrant officers could not stay their appetites on logarithms and the properties of compensating magnets as applied to the compass. They told him so, both verbally and by suggestive action, and by the time his ship turned harborward for bunker coal his sore body and swollen ears had almost persuaded him that his heroes of fiction were arrant liars.

Still he persevered. By devious means he secured the steam pinnace's compass and hid it in the mess; then, from the cabin of the navigating lieutenant, he stole a thirty-inch bar magnet, sawed it into short pieces, and prosecuted his studies in higher navigation.

The climax came when he had to hurriedly conceal his playthings and, shoving the compass under the lieutenant's wash-basin, he dropped a handful of magnetized iron behind the chronometer cases.

Flogging was abolished in the navy long ago, but ruined chronometers were not in mind when the law was passed. The whipping Timothy Clegg received in private session from a big bo'sun's mate, with the commander and officers lending moral support, effectually cured him of the navy fever. The first *sampan* that touched the ship after her anchors were down, took Timothy ashore cowering under an evil-smelling heap of native sleeping mats.

He had starved until the ship pulled out again; then, casting about for means of leaving Singapore, he had fallen foul of the skipper and mate of the *Brosy Lass*. They were looking for one or two hands to complete their crew, and Timothy ran into them just after they had got them.

But he had heard their schooner was bound direct for a Java port, and he was desperate. He pleaded so hard that the skipper, after a short parley with the mate, grinningly told him he might work his passage if he liked, but he'd get no pay; they didn't need him, anyway.

SO TIMOTHY joined the *Brosy Lass*, bound for Java. But Java never hove in sight. The schooner was a rank pearl poacher; and for six months she cruised and stole, dodged the patrol and returned to steal again, until her hold was full of shell and the skipper's strong box held a small fortune in pearls.

All this time Timothy was the butt of the ship. He was too much of a dreamer for the men to understand him. He still pored over his theory of navigation, but only looked at the *Brosy Lass's* compass from afar: that whipping lingered in his memory. Instead of practise, he spent long hours in working uncouth diagrams of compass

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compensation that, rough as they were, got amazingly close to a correct solution. When the schooner turned her bows toward Batavia at last Timothy sighed relievedly and forgot all the hardships gone by in the bright hopes for a new start in the near future. He meant to try the merchant marine this time, where a matter of inches was no bar to advancement.

But now a check was experienced, and his old fears returned, for the little warship that had chased the *Brosy Lass* through the growing storm into a dangerous harbor was the same ship he had deserted from. And Timothy was not to know that his loss had been hailed with joy by all hands.

He knew he was a deserter, and all the sea fiction he had imbibed told him that a hempen collar at a yard-arm was the best he could expect if he were caught.

Now he half-consciously went through the business of getting the men's supper in the stuffy little forecastle, his brain a hazy mass of terror and indecision. The port where the schooner lay was merely a place of call for wanderers of the seven seas, without regular communication with anywhere, and, if he again deserted, he might find himself worse off.

Yet that little warship outside troubled him. He was a bunch of quivering nerves when the crew came stamping and roaring to their meal.

"Hey, git a move on, dog's body!" shouted a big diver, thumping Timothy between the shoulders. "We want grub quick; the skipper's takin' all hands ashore fer a run 'round."

"Ashore? Me too?" stammered Timothy, at once deciding to accept the luck.

He would stay here until that warship had vanished.

"I s'pose so," retorted the seaman, attacking the dish of hash. "You're a hand, ain't yuh? I seen feet handier'n you, but you count one, just the same."

A half-eaten supper was joyously left at a hail from aft. The men trooped along the deck to where the skipper and mate stood, and Timothy brought up the rear, hugging under his coat a small bundle of his most precious treasures.

"One of you fellows with sharp eyes get aloft and see if the bulldog's light's still in sight," said the skipper, and when a man had disappeared into the darkness at the mainmast-head he told the rest:

"You fellows have worked hard for six months without a run ashore. Now I'm going to hire a couple o' boats to help tow the schooner around to the other entrance, and you can all come along and shake a leg for an hour. But, mind, you hang together; no driving off after adventures; as soon as I get the boats we pull out, and you'll all come aboard when I do. If any of you don't want to go ashore on these terms, why, stay aboard. Get the longboat over."

The man aloft came down with his report as the boat dropped into the water.

"The gunboat's standing north, Skipper," he said. "She's almost out o' sight, and going. I could only catch the light as the seas flattened a bit."

"Standing north, eh? Well, she'll put about and stand south pretty soon. She can't know that northern passage. We'll be ready to pull out that way about the time she's back here. Into the boat now."

The men piled into the boat like schoolboys bound on a picnic, and most eager of all was Timothy, barely able to control his legs for sheer eagerness.

"Hey, you! You stay aboard and watch the ship!" growled the skipper, laying a flat hand on Timothy's flat chest and flinging him back from the rail. "This is a man's party. And while we're gone you can clean up the cabin and wash the fo'c'sle dishes. Git out, now! D'ye want me to wallop you?"

Timothy shrank back, open-mouthed, as much from stupefaction as from fear of a blow. The boat was gone before he realized what had happened. Then his rage burst forth in a paroxysm of weeping; he stumbled about the deck wringing his hands, and stamping his feet, crying shrill threats after the vanished boat.

But the whistling wind bit through his thin clothes, and his blood, thinned by months of tropical roasting, never too rich at any time, sent him shivering into the cabin, there to finish out his fit of anger.

LAYING his bundle on the table, he flung himself into the skipper's chair and gazed gloomily and unseeingly up into the skylight. He made no effort to carry out the skipper's orders, simply sweeping aside the dishes to make room for his elbows. As he stared upward, he saw the telltale compass, above the skipper's chair, and arose to examine it.

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Then recurred the memory of that awful whipping on the warship, and he slunk away from sight of the compass. He wandered into the skipper's cabin, and meddled with the parallel rulers, and dividers, and fingered the ancient sextant with which the *Brosy Lass* was partly navigated. Far more dependence was placed on dead reckoning in that schooner, and local knowledge was her skipper's sheet anchor.

Then Timothy idly opened a scarred mahogany case, and let the lid drop suddenly. It was the chronometer, and it brought more memories. He turned to leave the cabin, and his eye lit upon something that he really did want; something he had longed for the use of for weeks. He picked up a can of liquid glue, and went back to the main cabin with something like happiness on his face.

Now he cleared a roomy portion of the table, and opened his bundle. Tenderly he brought forth a clumsily made wooden box, three-parts covered with scraps of pearl-shell. He had seen some of the men making those beautiful shell-boxes, and, struck with their charms, he had applied his own inexpert hands to the task of making one. In spite of the men's ridicule and abuse he had persevered in the laborious fitting together of the shell mosaic, for it was a labor of love.

Somewhere on the other side of the world he had a home, where folks believed in him, where a younger sister still in school shared his ambitions and stoutly asserted her conviction that her brother would outshine every salt-sea hero that had gone before. The shell-box had not been finished for lack of glue. The men might borrow the skipper's can at any time; but Timothy, never.

Here was his chance, and he took it. In five minutes he was deep in the intricacies of fitting tiny pieces of iridescent shell to rebellious wood, and as he worked, his homely face took on a glow that erased the deep lines of past hardships.

The schooner surged to the incoming swell, and tugged at her taut cable with violent jerks that shook her to the sternpost. But Timothy worked on, too intent to notice the ordinary noises of a straining ship. It was a sound of another kind that brought him to his feet with a startled jump: the sound of a boat bumping at the side, and voices.

Snatching up the glue can Timothy ran with it into the skipper's room. Then he stood dumfounded, for, through the loosely fastened deadlight he heard the voices more plainly, and they were strange voices. Forgetting his shell-box in his fright, he hesitated, then ran swiftly up the short companionway into the dark deck-house.

The sound of men scrambling over the side sent him huddling into the darkest corner of the house, and he was speedily apprised of the strangers' intentions. Hoarse voices conversed within ten feet of his concealment, and then four men moved toward the cabin stairs.

"To blazes with the shell!" growled the leader. "We got no time to fool with that. Get the skipper's strong box; that's the stuff; and bear a hand, they'll be back soon."

Timothy's almost buried ideals revived, and he thought of duty. He ought to defend his captain's property with his life, according to everything he had ever read of heroes. Then he caught the flash of four knives in the hands of four stealthy men, and a cold shudder ran down to his bare toes. Physical fear gripped him, and he drew back as the marauders almost brushed him in passing below.

As their feet scraped on the steps, Timothy's mind cast back to the moment when he was forced to stay on board, not being fit to go with men. At that moment he had decided to take the chance and stay ashore until that little warship had departed in renewed chase of the schooner. Now the chance offered again, and he gasped as he realized it.

Alone, he was utterly unable to hoist out the one boat remaining on board after the crew rowed ashore, and he had given the idea but a fleeting consideration; now there was a boat hanging to a painter right to his hand; what was easier than to slip down into it, cut the painter, and beach her somewhere along the dark shore beyond the scattered lights?

He was furious at the treatment he had received in the *Brosy Lass*, and his fury intensified now when he saw a way out of his servitude in spite of skipper and mate and crew. They deserved to lose their stolen wealth, anyhow, and he laughed cunningly at the thought that, whether they had their pearls or lost them their fate would still be the same when once that gunboat overhauled them. He began to feel friendly to the robbers below.

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But the feeling did not alter his new resolve to take their boat. He untied the painter silently, and hauled the boat up short. Then he bethought him of the shell-box he had left. He must have that. Beneath his feet he heard the sounds of hurried search; drawers flung out, and lockers burst open to the oaths of the rummagers who were beginning to show the stress under which they toiled.

The *Brosy Lass* was no stranger in that port. Her skipper could be counted on to terribly avenge the attempt on his goods, if he happened back and caught the intruders. Timothy stepped to the skylight and looked down. Dark figures passed from cabin to cabin, and the leader came from the skipper's cabin bearing a box. Even as he watched, Timothy saw the robber step to the table, and dash his find down on top of the precious shell-box, smashing it to shining splinters.

"The brutes! Oh, the beasts!" Timothy choked, ripping his hands through his tangled hair and staggering back.

All his loving care was gone for nothing, and in that instant his rage made something like a man of him.

"Just for that I'll stay here and see them killed. The dirty robbers!"

WITHOUT further thought of consequences, he sprang to the rail, cast off the boat's painter, and sent her swirling away empty into the darkness. Then heavy steps on the stairs warned him to look out for his own safety, and he dodged into his dark corner again as the leader of the marauders burst on deck in a towering rage.

The fellow peered shoreward long and keenly, then shouted through the skylight:

"They ain't started off yet, but we got no time to waste. Bust the bulkhead; that strong box is there somewheres."

Instinctively he stepped to the rail to assure himself of the boat's safety, and now his voice roared out furiously:

"Hey, drop everything and come up! Who in —— made fast that painter? The boat's gone!"

Timothy trembled at the storm that roared past him as the other three men rushed through the companionway mouthing their consternation.

The group stood for some minutes, striving to pierce the darkness in the hope that their boat might even yet be within reach; but the strengthening gusts of wind sweeping down over the high land gave added impulse to the already swiftly running ebb tide, and the boat was of a certainty careering blithely toward the open sea.

"What we goin' to do now?" demanded a voice, and another took up the question: "Stay here an' git scuppered by this ship's tough crowd? Can't swim ashore in the teeth o' this wind and sea."

"No, blast you for croakers!" exploded the leader, swinging fiercely upon his mates. "I won't swim nor yet get hurted. Between the devil an' the deep sea, give me the deep sea. The stuff's aboard, ain't it? Well then, we got a fair wind, an' lots of it, an' what more do yuh want?

"Git sail on this old hooker, lively! We'll slip the cable an' git out before that bulldog stands inshore again. We got as much right to what's in this ship as the fellers who stole it, haven't we? Shake a leg. I think that's the boat coming off!"

The hint put speed into the rascals' limbs, and they tore the stops from the mains'l, which had been furled with the reefs still tied in it after running in. And while they worked over the head of Timothy, crouching in the deck-house, they laid their plans with panting voices.

"What yuh goin' to do with her?"

"Run down to Rossel Island."

"Beach her?"

"Sure, and sell the wreck if we can. We'll find that box on the way, though, and if we have to let the shell and ship go we won't lose anything much."

The men finished loosing the mains'l and ran forward to cast off the headsail gaskets. Then Timothy crept out, took his courage in his hands, and slipped down to the cabin. His awakened brain had been working, and he was finding himself. First he unrolled the working chart and shivered ecstatically as he applied the parallel rulers and dividers according to the teaching of his nautical books.

It seemed simple after all, as indeed it is, to plot off a course and distance for a short run, given the position of the ship and the position of the port she seeks. Then, all aglow, he sought out the deck magnet the skipper carried in case he ever shipped a compass-disturbing cargo.

"Only fit to wash the fo'c'sle dishes, he said, did he?" muttered Timothy, dropping

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the magnet inside his belt. "I'll show him what I'm fit for—and this other beast, who busted my shell-box!"

He passed around the table bound for the lazarette hatch, which opened in the cabin floor and where he intended to hide until the schooner reached the open. As he went, an afterthought of moment struck him, and he leaped on a chair. Then he smashed the telltale compass overhead, and tore out the card.

"That was a lucky thought!" he grinned.

With a final look around the cabin, and a sharp scrutiny of the harbor through the after ports, he removed the padlock from the hatch, dropped below, and drew the hatch over him.

Soon he felt the *Brosy Lass* heel heavily as the mains'l was jerked aloft. Followed distant cries, a crashing roar of slipped chain, and a staggering smash of sea under the counter. Other shouts on deck were followed by the grinding of the rudder-head in the casing that ran up through the lazarette as the helm was put over, then the schooner heeled finally to the pull of her canvas, and the thrum of racing outside the skin told Timothy that she was away.

He lay quiet until the sounds overhead announced slackened sheets and a change of course. Then he knew he was at sea, and must play out his part. Nobody had come into the cabin since he dropped below, but with open water to leeward he knew that the desperate men who had stolen the schooner in self-defense would soon split into watches, and some of them would want food before the night was out.

Timothy had formulated a plan, and prayed to all the gods of simpletons at sea that he might find backbone to go through with it to the end. He was concerned chiefly about the bar magnet under his belt. It was clumsy and unstowable, yet upon it depended much. A bright idea flashed upon him, and he tore a string from a sack of lentils and hitched the iron about his neck under his shirt.

Then, with a gritted call to his courage, he emerged from the hatch into the cabin and went to work to clear off the table as if the job had never been interrupted.

Presently stamping feet overhead followed a bellowed hail, and a hoarse voice shouted above the screeching gale:

"Take hold of her now, Jerry, and keep her as she goes. Me and Tom'll snatch forty winks. Give us a call at midnight, or before if anything crops up. You won't see the bulldog; I caught her light away under the north end just now. She's heard about the northern entrance, maybe, and is waitin' fer the *Lass* there."

Timothy stiffened himself for the encounter, though his knees shook pitiably. But he managed to carry an air of vacant disinterestedness when two dripping figures stamped into the cabin and halted abruptly with a volley of oaths.

"GREAT dogfish! Who're you?" demanded the leader, seizing Timothy roughly by the arm.

The other man scowled ferociously, and a knife appeared in his hand, apparently without effort on his part.

"Steward, sir," replied Timothy, looking up blankly.

Then he pulled away and went on with his work at the table. Gradually a grin of understanding stole over the two faces watching him, and the leader shoved him away with a gesture of contempt.

"Huh, he's loony, Tom!" he said. "Don't even know us from the proper crew. He's harmless, an' perhaps he'll come in useful."

"Yes sir, I'm very useful," Timothy assured him, floundering past with arms laden with dishes. "Stand a wheel, you know, sir, keep lookout fine, too. Want coffee at eight-bells, all right I make it. Clean dishes, never sleep, never eat—number one steward, sir, I tell you."

The deck sloped dizzily as the schooner plunged into the night, and the laden steward slid into the pantry without lifting his feet from the floor. But his dishes were unfortunate. They crashed to the deck and the pieces rolled broadcast, yet Timothy's arms remained in position as if still carying a load.

Tom guffawed outright, and slipped his knife out of sight when the steward looked blankly at his empty arms, then at the débris at his feet.

So obviously harmless was he that they left him to prepare coffee while they started one more search for the skipper's strong box before turning in. Timothy staggered along to the galley, some of his old fears reviving when he saw the tremendous seas that had arisen since the schooner had slipped into the port. But his resolve

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proved stronger and he climbed to the top of the galley and anxiously astern.

He had a definite task to perform, which could not be started until the last loom of the island had merged into the blackness of the night. Overhead the sky leaned like a black pall, starless, opaque, and the sight gave him a thrill of comfort. Stars, for a wonder, would be most unwelcome to Timothy then, dreamer though he was.

He clambered down, and went into the galley to make coffee, and while the stove was getting hot sought out for himself a short, heavy knife from the cutlery rack. Then, just before returning aft with his steaming pot, he climbed up again and took another searching survey of the tumbling waste of waters. The island might be swallowed up for all sign that showed now against the troubled face of sea and sky.

"Going eight knots, and due east," Timothy reckoned, trying to estimate the exact time the schooner had been sailing.

He mounted to the poop with his hot coffee-pot, and walked aft to the wheel.

"I'll bring your coffee up here, eh?" he suggested to the helmsman.

The discovery of the queer steward had been passed along, and the fellow simply grunted, and Timothy passed into the cabin. But in that brief moment near the wheel he had peeped into the binnacle and verified the vessel's course by the compass. He had also satisfied himself that the old-fashioned square binnacle was fastened with a hook, and not locked.

The cabin clock struck six-bells—eleven o'clock—as he emerged from the little pantry with two steaming mugs of coffee for the fellows on deck. While in the cabin, he had taken a pencil and scribbled some figures on the white-painted bulkhead, arriving at a result to his calculations that impelled him to execute a shambling shuffle of delight on the reeling floor.

He handed the coffee to the man at the wheel, then groped forward to find the other fellow on deck. He found him in the galley, huddled over the fire, and there left him with his hot beverage, going out immediately, and apologetically closing the half-door. A sharp glance aft satisfying him that he could not be seen from the wheel, he stepped over to leeward and passed his hand down the straining parts of the fore-sheet to the seizing near the block. With his heavy knife he carefully sawed the taut rope half-way through, shuddering involuntarily at the ominous cracking of the severed strands. Then he hurried back to the cabin, slipped into the pantry, and waited in an agony of suspense.

In spite of his expectancy, his heart jumped tremendously when the crash came. A report like a gunshot forward was succeeded by a thunderous thrashing of canvas, and two startled voices bellowed above the howling wind. The two men sleeping awoke and rushed out on deck; Timothy followed close at their heels.

"Fore-sheet's parted!" shrieked a voice, and dimly a dark figure could be seen dodging the sweeping fore-boom that threatened to tear the foremast up by the roots.

"——! That's a job for more than us!" roared the leader.

"I can stand a wheel, sir!"

It was Timothy, and the leader swung around and snatched at the help, slight though he considered it. Timothy was given the wheel, and warned of the penalties he would incur if he didn't keep the ship up to the wind. Then the four ruffians went to tackle the flying fore-boom, and Timothy swelled with the responsibility thrust upon him.

It was a half-hour's job to secure the boom and re-reeve the broken sheet. In the darkness, fortunately for Timothy, it was impossible to discover the cause of the break, and the four men trooped aft entirely pleased with themselves.

"Keep her away on her course!" was the order.

As Timothy twirled the spokes, bringing the *Brosy Lass* on an easterly course again, a shout went up from the robbers.

"——! The wind's hauled 'most sixteen points!"

The leader looked hard at the compass. It pointed steadily east.

"In with th' main-sheet!" he shouted, casting off the turns.

Then fore-sheet and head-sheets had to come in, until now the schooner was by the wind, bucking into a heavy sea which she had not felt before in its strength while running before it.

"When it shifts that much it brings a wallopin' sea," commented the leader, peering dubiously at Timothy. That worthy made hard work of steering now; he allowed the schooner to luff, and every spar and timber shook. A stronger man

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shouldered him away from the wheel, and he was bruskly ordered to prepare more coffee, and food, and then to make himself scarce until daylight.

Timothy broke into a cold perspiration as soon as he was safely back in the cabin, for he had come through a period of stress that might well disturb a bigger and stronger man. But there was yet much to do, and he had seen signs in the sky that told him a flying cloud that should reveal telltale stars was quite a possibility before morning.

Keeping a wary ear for footsteps, he darted into the skipper's cabin again, and frantically sought for the signal book. The flags were rolled up in their original locker, with the letters stencilled on the luff binding; the *Brosy Lass* was not addicted to signaling. Finding no book, growing more nervous as the minutes sped by, Timothy took a chance on a signal method of his own.

He took out the flags corresponding to the message he wished to send at the proper time, and thrust them under his shirt until he regained the pantry. Then he toggled them together and rolled them up. A heavy marlinespike from the mate's cabin completed his arrangements, and hurriedly setting out some food on the table, he ran on deck to report it ready.

But now his nerve had reached its limit. He saw two hairy, grim faces illumined by the light of the binnacle, and his heart failed him. He dared not go below to try to sleep. Casting a frightened glance at the heavens, he saw the cloud-wrack driving in smoky masses, and his heated imagination tricked him into the belief that a star shone here and there.

He saw two men go below to eat, peered timorously up at the sweeping mast-heads, and gulped noisily in sheer physical sickness. But sore beset by fear as he was, Timothy was facing his great hour and would see the thing through. Slipping down to the lee-side, he clambered painfully into the slack fore-rigging, and toiled upward to the crosstrees, where he hung tenaciously, panting for breath and dizzy to nausea.

HOURS passed, and he dozed. He had wrapped a turn of the fore-topsail gasket about his body, and hung there limp and chilled. He opened his eyes to a consciousness that the sky was growing lighter, and a hot flush ran through him at the imminent climax.

Peering over the bows he fancied he could make out a dark blur which was neither sea nor sky; along the eastern horizon the tumbling ocean was certainly grayer. He stiffened suddenly at a roaring shout on deck.

"Hey, Jerry, watch yer steerin'! There's the Southern Cross over th' port quarter, yuh crab!"

"Port quarter! Yer drunk! I'm steerin' all right, she's headin' due east right now. Go soak yer head; I can't see any star."

The dawn came, and brought no promise of sun, for which Timothy was duly grateful. The keen eyes that had seen the Southern Cross on the port quarter, when it should have been on the starboard beam, had made no mistake. Only the fleeting clouds that so swiftly repaired the damage had given Timothy a brief respite.

But the end was in sight now. Every moment the gray light grew, and a shout, of astonishment and rage, pealed aloft.

Right over the port bow loomed the land, where on an easterly course no land should have been within five hundred miles; and, revealed by the watery daylight against the dark background with which she had been merged before, a small, black-hulled, business-like gunboat stormed to meet the *Brosy Lass*.

"It's that loony steward!" howled somebody. "He's cooked the compass! Where is the rat? I told yuh I see the Southern Cross to port, didn't I, yuh sweep?"

"Slack away th' main-sheet! Trim sail lively! Then dig that swine out!"

The schooner bore away in the futile hope of escaping her fate, then three men ran to search the cabins for Timothy. It was the helmsman who found him, for, squinting aloft, he saw a clumsily climbing figure shinning up the fore-topmast, and presently from the truck streamed a string of six flags, kept perpendicular by a heavy steel marlinespike hanging to the end.

"Up here, quick!" roared the helmsman, capering madly. "He's up th' foremast, a-signallin' th' bulldog! Loony? ——!"

The leader sprang through the companionway, looked up, then dashed toward the fore-rigging, howling:

"Up after him! Get him an' twist his scraggy neck afore the bulldog bites."

Three men sprawled up the weather

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fore-rigging, and things looked bad for the "vinegar caterer." The leader had reached the lowermast-head, when a gun barked on the gunboat, and an iron messenger raced past the schooner and plunged into the sea ahead.

It was the one thing needed to brace Timothy's fast failing courage. As the first man reached for his leg, he gathered up his signal, shortened the swing, and swung savagely with the marlinespike at the fellow's head. Twice he struck, and the blood streamed down the furious face looking up at him.

"One of you slide 'round the other side!" the man shouted, dashing the blood from his eyes and starting up again.

Timothy watched like a cat, determined to make them earn their prey. Then another gun belched iron from the gunboat, and this time the projectile passed through the mainsail. His enemies paused uneasily; but the leader's lust for vengeance spurred them, and up they climbed.

Timothy was nigh the giving-up point. He presented a picture calculated to force attention, with his contorted features, his huddled, tense body, his chattering teeth, and, every time he launched his weapon, his multi-colored battle standard of six small square flags which, gathered up for another blow, draped him like some Hallowe'en grotesquerie.

A hand clutched his ankle, and a volcanic curse rolled up.

"Now I got yuh, blast yer liver an' lights! Down yuh come!"

The grip tightened, and Timothy fought frantically to hang on to the slender spar. Then came the end. A third shot from the warship brought the foremast down with a crash, hurling pursued and pursuers into the weltering sea, the schooner swung into the wind, deprived of her headsail, and rode to the wreckage as to a sea anchor.

WHEN Timothy was hauled into the gunboat's cutter, he was enwrapped with his strange string of signals, and in spite of his near escape from death his rescuers were forced to laugh. Then the young officer, bending over him, started up with a cry of surprise.

"Why, it's Timothy Clegg, who magnetized old Jimmy-the-One's chronometers!"

"Then that accounts for his original method of signaling," rejoined a midshipman. "P. O. L. I. C. E. spells Police in any case, though it may not be in the code book. If he'd bent the spelling pennant on top of the lot, we'd have got it sooner."

A prize crew went aboard the *Brosy Lass* and a tow-rope was passed to her. Then, with the ship headed in for the little port to complete the business by running down the schooner's proper crew, Timothy was taken to interview the commander.

"Well, Clegg," remarked the august personage, "you've distinguished yourself again I hear. Was this an accident? What were those fellows after you for?"

"Wasn't an accident, sir," replied Timothy, blushing. "They stole the ship and I made 'em fetch her back. I knew just where you was, sir, and thought we might connect."

"Heavens! You make me a present of a badly-needed poacher, after the experience you had in my ship?"

"That was nothing to what them fellers done. They busted my shell-box, sir!"

"But how in the name of Jehoshaphat did you bring that schooner back if they didn't want you to? There were four of 'em, weren't there?"

"Remember what I done to the chronometers, sir, with them magnets, you know?"

"Yes, by Jupiter! I do——"

An officer at the door reported:

"Wigwag from the schooner says her compass has been tampered with. It points fourteen points out of the way, and they've found a ten-inch bar magnet in the binnacle."

The commander nodded acknowledgment, then slowly turned an official eye upon Timothy. The official face gradually broke into a ripple of decorous amusement, and Timothy, fidgeting from one foot to the other, twisted his fingers nervously, returned the commander's look, and grinned. The commander beckoned to the navigating lieutenant, and pronounced the fate of Timothy Clegg.

"Enter him on the ship's books before we get in. Then he'll share in the prize money. Tell the chief boatswain to take him in hand, and the yeoman of signals to help to the best of his ability.

"Some of the young gentlemen can take charge of his physical improvement, and we'll make a sailor of him before the commission's up. Of course he made a mess of things before! So would Nelson, if they'd kept him scouring pots in a galley!"

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AN EXPRESS FROM LIGONIER

By HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "Yancey of the Rangers," "Red Toll," etc.

THE only British soldiers on the Great Lakes in the Summer of 1763 were cooped up in Fort Detroit. Fort Pitt, at the junction of the Monongahela and Alleghany Rivers, was the second vital point of the Western garrisons to successfully defy the Indians. Its commander, Captain Simeon Ecuyer, conducted himself with unusual gallantry throughout the siege. From Fort Pitt to the frontier settlements in eastern Pennsylvania extended the old wilderness road, cut by General Forbes in '58 when he reduced Fort Du Quesne—renamed Pitt by the English. This "road" was only a bush-grown, stump-studded trail running through two hundred miles of virgin forest.

There were two small posts between Pitt and the settlements: Fort Ligonier, under Lieutenant Archibald Blane, and Fort Bedford, commanded by Captain Lewis Ourry. It was of the utmost importance to the provinces that these garrisons should be maintained, as their reduction by the savages would snap Ecuyer's slender line of communication with the frontier. Ligonier was fifty miles from Pitt and Bedford nearly a hundred. Between the posts were scattered the huts of Indian traders and the isolated clearings of pioneers.

Unfortunately the jealousies between the provinces, and the dissensions of the provincials and their governors prevented intelligent co-operation. The various assemblies wasted time over minor matters. Under Quaker domination the Pennsylvania Assembly voted to raise a force of seven hundred men, who were to serve during the harvest season only, and, at that, in the settled parts of the province, refraining entirely from any offensive warfare.

Captain Ourry in an express dispatch sent out from Bedford in June announced his force consisted of three corporals and nine privates, but added that the influx of ninety-odd terrified families had permitted him to form two companies of militia. Ten days later, however, the settlers ventured back to their little farms, leaving the five bastions of the fort to be guarded and defended by a force of twelve. And at that time the garrison held seven Indian prisoners! In the middle of June Ourry grimly announced through the express—

"Some scalps taken up Dening's Creek yesterday, and today some families murdered and houses burned, have restored me my militia."

For several hundred miles up and down the frontier the country swarmed with Delawares and Shawnees, duplicating the atrocities of the Ottawas and allied tribes around Detroit. Presqu' Isle—Erie—capitulated under a promise of safe conduct and was promptly butchered, only two managing to escape. Fort Lebœuf, fifteen miles from Presqu' Isle and on the trail to Pitt, was destroyed, with most of the small

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garrison escaping under cover of night. Venango, below Lebœuf, was wiped out, with no survivor to tell the story. These successes of the Indians left only Ligonier to hold the wilderness road to Pitt.

During all these attacks and massacres Colonel Bouquet at Philadelphia constantly received reports from the devastated country by express. The express-rider was the prototype of the pony-express. He took all chances, suffered all deaths, did his heroic work anonymously with no hope of glory or gain, and was the only medium of communication between the besieged and the settlements.

Driven by desperation, men break from a *cul de sac* in an attempt to escape or fetch succor. The express-rider followed such forlorn enterprises as a matter of regular employment; and after breaking through the painted circle he turned about and returned in order to do it again. Their names are not recorded in history. They went and returned as impersonal as the winds. There was something uncanny in their successful evasion of traps, and their knack in leaving and entering a beleaguered post.

Now and then one dropped out, but another quietly took his place; and the flow of dispatches to headquarters kept up. Gladwyn at Detroit and Ecuyer at Pitt corresponded with each other quite regularly, although for one of their soldiers to thrust his nose outside the stockade meant a fearful death. So the express-riders remain the unsung heroes of the most hazardous of all border activities.

Friendly Indians often were used, especially between posts where the distance was not great. But as they were frequently mistaken for hostiles and promptly shot down by the very men their efforts were to succor, their delivery of messages was problematical even after they ran the lines. The reliable express usually was a backwoodsman, the savage's equal or superior in craft and far outpointing him in bravery.

AND none along the wilderness road in the bloody Summer of '63 exceeded in reckless daring the Virginian, Cleb Barters. His fringed frock and Indian leggings swinging over a stockade brought a glow of renewed hope and optimism to more than one little garrison. And when, with equal nonchalance, he vanished over a palisade to challenge the battery of ferocious eyes, he left depressed hearts behind him.

He came from the western part of Virginia and had been schooled in the Kentucky country. The self-confidence burned into his soul by the exigencies of unmapped places was monumental, and allowed him but one point of view, often a very narrow one but always his own. He scoffed at all military measures for cooperation.

"A man oughter look arter hisself without no help," he bluntly informed more than one commander obsessed by notions of drill.

This attitude made him worthless as a soldier but left him superb as an express.

It was dusk when he arrived at Ligonier from Fort Pitt, carrying dispatches from Ecuyer to Bouquet. At his heels swarmed the Delawares, beside themselves with rage at his escape. A volley of bullets chased him through the gate, killing several horses, including the one from which he had just dismounted. He lighted his pipe and smoked placidly while the small garrison sprang to quarters.

"Don't waste no powder on 'em, Leftenant," he drawled as Blane hurried by. "They're too far away f'r soldier-shootin'. Reckon you'll have to scare up a hoss if I'm to make Bedford tomorrer."

"Take your pick of any that's left, but wait for my dispatches," cried back the lieutenant.

The savages refrained from assaulting in force and contented themselves with occasional volleys which did no damage. As the darkness increased, the firing dropped, ceased, and the woods resumed their wonted calm. Blane, returning to his quarters, halted to learn the news up the line.

Barters, always speaking with exasperating deliberation, informed:

"Two soldiers shot an' scalped within a mile o' Pitt a few days afore I pulled out. Ecuyer started a green express f'r Venango, but th' fool got hisself shot inside half a mile an' come back."

"Nothing but killings, and it is always the English who suffer," bitterly exclaimed Blane.

Barters slowly detached a hank of coarse hair from the back of his belt and hung it on a log to dry, and corrected:

"I got one comin' down—an' I was in something of a hurry at that. Tried to jump me at Bushy Run. Ol' Maje went through 'em like a bullet. This cuss—and

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he nodded toward the scalp—jumped fair into th' saddle—so I fetched him along a piece with me. Hear 'bout Calhoun an' thirteen other traders being 'bushed on Beaver Crick? He 'n' two men pulled into Pitt just as I was leavin'—rest wiped out. Ecuyer has it all writ down in th' dispatches I'm relayin' to Bouquet. Some hell to pay if th' provinces don't quit catawaulin' an' send up some men an' powder.

"Give me a hundred men o' my own pickin' an' I'll git more hair than all th' regulars they can find room f'r on th' border. Say, you ain't got a hoss I'd insult a Injun by ridin' at him." Then with an unexpected explosion of picturesque profanity he vowed: "They'll pay f'r ol' Maje's death with enough scalps to make him a blanket. They got me all riled up."

With that he strolled to the stockade to try his long rifle on any incautious foe.

Blane was signing his dispatches when Barters lounged into the room with satisfaction showing on his lean and leathery face.

"I got one," he announced. "Gittin' so dark your regulars didn't want me to shoot, but a bush in th' clearin' seemed to be actin' queer. First bush I ever see what could move 'round like it had legs."

"Good! Doubtless a scout coming to spy on us in the dark. Here are the dispatches. Sorry you've got to make it on foot."

"Afoot ——! Think I'm fond o' walkin'?," retorted the express. "Now you just take your time an' write all you want to. Th' Delawares must have some o' th' settlers' hosses hid up back in th' woods. I'll be back afore mornin'."

"Good heavens, man! Isn't there enough peril without your *visiting* the Indians?" protested Blane. "Besides, it's of the greatest importance that my message gets through with the least possible delay."

"You just hold your pucker till I scout 'round a bit," soothed Barters. "An' tell them fool sentinels not to go blazin' away at me if I take th' fence flyin'. S' long."

Irritated at the prospect of delay and genuinely worried over the safety of the express, Blane sat irresolute for a few moments, then rose and followed the Virginian to urge him to forego his quest for a horse. He knew Barters could make the forty-odd miles to Bedford with scarcely a pause and that he would be safer afoot than mounted. But by the time the commander reached the gate the express had disappeared. The sentinel, nervously attentive, declared no one had passed him. Others on guard about the fort denied having seen him. Nevertheless he was somewhere outside the post, lost in the gloom of night.

BARTERS worked his way north of the wilderness road without discovering any signs of savages. Somewhere near the fort was a camp of the Delawares. All day the smoke of burning cabins had been stenciling grim stories across the soft sky, and he knew horses had formed a part of the booty from the farms.

He realized foot travel was safer under the circumstances, for between him and Bedford, on the eastern slope of the mountains, was a permanent village of the Shawnee. To pass this danger zone afoot would be a simple matter for a woodsman bent only on getting through. But it would mean a wide detour and Barters was lazy. He preferred running great risks to insuring his safety by such tedious practises. He must be on his way to Bedford before sunrise and he vowed he would go horseback.

Then again, the cavalier strain always stirred up his blood at the prospect of danger. To his way of thinking, the acme of living consisted of the soft approach to village or ambush, then a wild plunge down the red lane, with a chance shot from his rifle and a blow from his ax for those who were overbold. His tactics had worked beautifully at Bushy Run. To go afoot was to eliminate this sport. So he pressed on in search of a Delaware camp with never an Indian suspecting a white man was in their midst.

Striking a tributary to the Kiskiminitas, he knew he would find a camp somewhere on its banks, and followed it for two miles before halting. The blackness of the forest was thinning out. A ghostly light permitted him to distinguish tree trunks ahead. Crouching at the foot of a chestnut, he sniffed the air and his thin nostrils caught the acrid reek of smoke. Next there came a chorus of Indian yells.

"They got some one," he decided, rapidly reviewing the country with his mind's eye. "Le's see; Joy's folks wiped out. Dicky's cabin burned an' Dicky's at th' fort. Th' mowers was killed at Parker's place a week ago an' th' shack burnt. Must be ol' Ridge's place. Th' fool allers 'lowed they wouldn't touch him as he was a man o'

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peace. Yep; it's sure Ridge's shack burnin' —an' he had a hoss, quite a likely one."

Old Ridge was an eccentric character who believed gentleness and non-resistance would evoke similar sentiments in breasts that had never known or understood anything but savagery. For more than a year he had lived unmolested while his neighbors fell beneath the ax. But it was not the settler's fate that filled Barters' speculations as he advanced toward the opening. He was concerned only with his chances of securing a mount. His heart was not hardened; simply immune to shocks.

Should he allow himself to dwell upon the harrowing scenes continually passing beneath his observation his mind would be paralyzed for helpful action. There was always one duty before him—to get the dispatches through. He ranged far and wide in his riding, and fugitives in the most pitiable condition were repeatedly being met with. Up and down the wilderness road resounded the wailings of those who had escaped the ax and stake; orphans and fragments of families.

There was scarcely man, woman or child to be met who did not register the tragedy of living in every look and expression. Those who escaped to the forts had witnessed sights that left an indelible impress. The talk of the day was one gruesome recital of horrible details connected with some butchery. From the Monongahela to the Susquehanna the same monotonous moaning note filled the land.

It was such an old story to Barters that his only emotion on reaching the edge of the clearing, where glowed the ruins of a cabin, was one of wonder that the old man had escaped his fate so long. He stared at the smoking embers for some minutes and sought to estimate how long since it was surrounded by the silhouettes of dancing devils. The Delawares would return to their camp in triumphant disorder, yet he did not wish to follow too closely.

"Shucks!" he grunted as the last log fell and left only the squat stone chimney and big fireplace standing. "Queer I can't remember 'bout that hoss—either his or Dicky's was white. I'm a dad-blamed fool to forgit that. I don't want no white hoss."

His efforts to recall the animal were interrupted by a fresh outburst of hideous howling in the woods ahead.

"That ain't no scalp yowl," he grunted as he crossed the opening to follow them. "Yet they're mighty well pleased 'bout something—an' they wouldn't make such a powwow over a hoss. Wonder if they got th' ol' man alive?"

The thought irritated him. If Ridge was a captive it meant the torture. This in turn meant the express must lose valuable time in spoiling the sport by sending a merciful bullet through the captive's head. Ridge was too old to help himself escape and it would be impossible for one man to get him away from the Indians.

"An' them papers oughter be on th' way afore sunrise," he lamented, hurrying on.

He came to their camp a mile beyond the burned cabin. They had kindled a fire on the bank of the stream and were dancing about something. He crept nearer, determined to do a good turn for the old man even if it lost him a horse. His joy was great on discovering the center of attraction was a small keg of rum. This explained the note of exultation in their yelping and left him free to pursue his original quest.

Turning back to the forest he examined the clearing carefully. Back from the dancing savages and near the edge of the woods stood a log cabin, once the home of some venturesome trader. In front of it burned a small fire. A smile of great content played over Barters' angular features as by the dim light of the fire he made out a horse tied to a tree.

"Reckon I ain't such a fool arter all," he complacently told himself as he began a stealthy approach toward the animal. "It's Dicky's hoss that is white. This nag is black. But it's funny I should git mixed up so 'bout hosses."

The Indians, a score or more, had piled fuel high on the fire by the stream, and its leaping flames partly lighted the whole clearing. The express chuckled softly at the simplicity of his task. He had only to walk up and take the horse. Keeping just within the edge of the woods, he boldly circled half-way 'round the clearing till behind the cabin. Suddenly he stiffened and remained motionless. The erect figure of a warrior was at the corner of the structure. Barters studied it through half-closed lids.

Why wasn't he rum drinking with his friends? It was most unusual for a brave to absent himself from a debauch. Barters first thought the man was a scout, sent to

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scour the woods and make sure there were no intruders. But by the time he pulled out his ax he was ready to dismiss this notion. The savage not only remained motionless but stood with his head sunk on his chest as though lost in thought, or else suddenly repining his absence from the drinking bout.

"He ain't sent to scout an' he ain't smelt me yet," mused Barters, thrusting the ax back into his belt. "He ain't guardin' th' hoss, as they could hitch th' nag near th' keg. An' there ain't 'nough discipline among Injuns to make him stand out here alone f'r a punishment. Wal, he can take a flyin' leap—I'll git th' hoss right out from under his painted nose."

HE GLIDED to the horse and patted him caressingly, but as he fumbled at the rawhide tether a woman's shriek stabbed him like a knife and sent him leaping back into the bush.

It was so totally unexpected, so poignant with despair and so typical of the wilderness women's suffering, it left him weak and panting. It was as though the horrid panorama of the frontier were unfolded before his gaze for the first time.

"A white woman! Gawd!" he hoarsely mumbled, crawling forth from the bush and glaring about in search of her.

The scream pealed forth a second time, but now his nerves were braced, and gnawing his lips he redoubled his efforts to locate her. He understood at last, and the presence of the warrior near the cabin was explained. The white woman was a prisoner in the cabin and her frenzied alarm was caused by the sentinel's behavior. For the savage had lighted a roll of bark and was holding it up to the small opening which served as window.

The torch illumined the ferocious features and Barters observed the guard was torturing the prisoner by making hideous grimaces at her. Perhaps his spleen at being debarred from the drinking furnished a devilish zest to his entertainment. Barters dropped on all fours and commenced crawling through the stumps toward the cabin.

The woman cried out again and the infinite terror in her voice brought Barters' head above a stump with a jerk. The Indian still stood at the tiny window but had improved on his tactics. In addition to grimacing he was thrusting his scalping-knife through the opening. Barters could visualize the distracted creature, crouching in the farthest corner and verging on madness as she watched the fiendish visage. The Indians about the keg either failed to hear the woman's outcry, or were indifferent; none came to investigate.

Barters instantly enlarged his plans.

"I'll git her," he murmured, dragging himself forward. "An' I'll git *you*, my painted friend."

Changing his course, he gained the side of the cabin opposite the pantomimist and grinned sardonically as he pictured the warrior's consternation on learning he was not alone with the woman.

As he flattened himself against the logs the express could hear the dull moaning of the wretched captive. He stole to the end of the structure and lying flat on his face cautiously peeped 'round the corner. The savage now was calling out guttural threats through the window. What had commenced as a bit of malignant play had worked the sentinel up to a blood-lust, as was shown by his heavy breathing and his fashion of lunging with the knife. And Barters could understand some of the fearful things he was saying.

Finally the Indian hissed—

"Big Turtle comes in to scalp the white squaw."

Barters edged forward, his forest dress blending with the brown earth. The warrior's name revealed he was of the Turtle tribe of the Delaware, a point the express would remember in making his report. The woman, too, seemed to understand the sinister speech and set up a quavering scream. Big Turtle grunted with satisfaction and started for the front of the cabin. With a flying leap Barters left the ground and landed on his back, crashing him to the ground. One startled yelp and then the knife smashed the vertebræ in the neck.

Crouching by the silent body till assured the warriors about the keg had heard nothing, Barters rose and held his victim before him, and thus masked gained the front of the cabin. From the stream it would look as though the sentinel were pacing his rounds and now was pausing to rest on the log before the door. Holding the corpse on his lap, the express removed the ax and knife from the belt, then reached behind him and unfastened the stout withe, and softly called out:

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"Shet up that noise—I'm a white man. When I give th' word come out an' I'll git you away."

The woman hushed her moaning for a moment. Then commenced a violent sobbing and in a choked voice took on:

"They killed my grandfather—I saw them. Oh, why didn't they kill me, too."

"Time 'nough f'r that if you don't quit that noise," Barters warned. "Git your nerves together an' step to th' door—no! Stay back."

For a glance over the dead warrior's shoulder warned him it was too late to get the woman away. The Indians had left the keg and were making for the cabin, dancing and gesticulating and whooping madly.

"If you're a white man, why don't you help me?" called out the prisoner.

"Th' rest o' th' band is comin'," growled Barters, allowing his victim to slip to the ground between his feet as he pushed back the door and darted inside. "We'll have to wait a bit, an' it'll be some fight."

The interior of the cabin was dark and he could see nothing. Sweeping his hands about to locate her he continued:

"They'll be here in a minute, 'bout twenty of 'em. I've fetched that feller's knife an' ax. Keep close to me an' smash everything you feel movin'. They'll find that skunk outside an' opine you got out an' did f'r him an' took his knife an' ax away. They won't look f'r me, an' that gives us the advantage if we work sharp. Where th' devil be you?"

"Oh, I can't! I can't! If I could only die now!" she moaned.

Barters wrinkled his nose in disgust and perplexity. Her voice seemed to come from the floor, yet feel with his moccasins as he would he could not locate her.

"Where 'n sin be you?" he demanded.

"Here," was the wailing answer, only it told him nothing.

He rapidly skirted the room till his hands encountered a low bunk. It was empty, but in the narrow space beneath it he found her.

"They killed my grandfather! I saw them strike——"

The rest ended in a shrill scream of abject terror.

Ignorant of almost everything that pertained to the polite usages of even border civilization, Barters' mind was abnormally quick to seize upon any advantage when cornered. The fact the Indians had no suspicion of his presence was a tremendous advantage. A dead warrior was before the unfastened door, his weapons gone. They would be sure to attribute the killing to her and would be off their guard in entering.

"Stay where you be," he hissed. "It's a raw chance but we must make the best of it."

Then he made sure she was entirely removed from the open floor space and tenderly placed his long rifle alongside her quivering body. As a further precaution he arranged a bearskin robe over the side of the bunk. A chorus of derisive yells sent him to the door. Peering through the cracks, he noted the fire before the cabin had died down until he could barely distinguish the newcomers. Their taunts and jibes puzzled him at first.

"Big Turtle smells the rum and goes to sleep," mocked a brave.

"He is very tired guarding the woman," cried another.

"Let him smell the rum we bring him and leap to his feet," howled another; and to give point to his jest he stooped over the silent form and blew heavily in his face.

The next moment he was bounding back, screeching like a wildcat. Another took his place and shook the dead man by the arm. His yelp of alarm was added to the first; and springing to the smoldering fire he snatched up a brand and whirled it about his head till it burst into flames. Then all could read the truth: dead warrior and empty belt and unfastened door.

"The white woman killed him and went away!" cried the warrior with the torch.

Doubtless the whole band would have rushed off in pursuit, thus allowing the prisoners a chance to escape, had not the woman at that moment groaned loudly.

"Reckon things is goin' to begin to begin 'bout now," mumbled Barters, stepping back and lifting his ax.

WITH a drunken whoop of rage the band charged the door, fighting and struggling with one another to see who should first pass the threshold. Barters' ax greeted the first comers, with none suspecting the trap. Then the pressure outside sent the van surging into the room, and the interior of the cabin became a shrieking inferno. Barters, hurled back in a corner, was content to feel the logs at his back, and proceeded to take toll from the

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perimeter of the screaming, maddened circle milling blindly about.

Wielding an ax in each hand he hewed up and down before him, and whatever passed within that area died or fell hideously wounded. Then a dying warrior in a death spasm clutched at the express's feet and for a moment he was off his guard. In that brief interval a bronzed hand fell on his coonskin hat and a frantic cry of fear and amazement warned Barters at least one warrior had penetrated the secret even in the darkness.

Without a second's hesitation he ducked under the arm and had the tell-tale by the throat and was down on top of him under a jumble of legs, and had stilled his tongue and was crawling back to his corner. But not the same Cleb Barters. Now he bled from several wounds.

Occasionally the woman punctuated the awful confusion with her shrill scream, whereat the savages sought her under foot, with the continuous din masking her position. Barters fought on, but more warily. Another excursion to the midst of the madly surging mob might be fatal. Blows struck by Indian fell on Indian.

For several minutes the mad mêlée continued till the warriors outside managed to make themselves heard and the few survivors inside began to realize they were walking over dead bodies. With a frightened howl those on their feet staggered through the door, leaving the express panting and bleeding in the shambles. A dozen braves had entered the cabin. Four emerged fearfully wounded.

Those who had been unable to get inside fell back in terror as the survivors came out. Barters knew this was his golden opportunity to escape. He could gain the horse before any attention would be paid him; once mounted he could defy the whole Delaware nation. But to dig the woman from beneath the bunk and take her with him was impossible. He pushed a limp body aside and closed the door on both warriors and temptation.

The cabin was thick with the dead. Through the cracks in the door he counted a dozen holding back by the small fire.

"The white woman is touched by the Great Spirit," gasped one of the wounded.

"She fought with the strength of many warriors," wearily added another.

"The Great Spirit aimed her blows, for she killed and killed and yet no Delaware touched her," shivered a third.

Barters' mind worked as it had never worked before. Could he gain the horse unseen the girl would not be harmed, for the Indians believed her to be under the protection of the Great Spirit—civilized people style it "crazy." His hand clutched the door and fell to his side. Should he leave her and take the horse the savages would know some one else had been in the cabin and would vent their vengeance upon her. Without a horse he would die in the wilderness, for he had lost much blood.

"If I could git both of us to th' nag without bein' seen," he muttered as he climbed over the dead and dragged her from beneath the bunk, shivering and moaning.

He managed to stand her on her feet and half carried, half dragged her to the door. But the situation outside had changed. Fresh voices were calling. More warriors, attracted by the confusion, were running from the forest and were being told of the white woman's wonderful fight.

Barters leaned her against the wall and hastily examined the small window. It was far too small to serve as an exit even had there been none outside to intercept them. He returned to the girl as more Indians joined the excited group. Again the astounding occurrence was recited, how one woman, weak and terrified, had been touched by the Great Spirit just as it was proposed to roast her, and had fought with the rage and strength of a demon.

"The Lame Turkey is wise. Let him speak to her," suggested one.

"Turkey tribe accounted for," mechanically muttered Barters. "That leaves only th' Wolf tribe."

A warrior who walked with a limp approached and respectfully called out:

"White woman, the Delaware want their dead. White woman, the Delaware are your friends. The Delaware never harm those who are touched by the Great Spirit. White woman, may the Delaware have their dead brothers?"

Barters knew the play was finished. He fished out his dispatches from Ecuyer and stuffed them into the bosom of her gown and thrust the warrior's knife and ax into her limp hands.

"Walk out among 'em. Git to th' hoss back o' th' cabin an' foller th' crick till you hit the wilderness road. Then ride like th'

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devil f'r Ligonier. Th' hoss will pick his way if you give him his head."

"They will kill me with fire," she murmured, speaking like one in a trance.

"They won't touch you. Don't look at 'em. Don't let on you see 'em."

Outside Lame Turkey whispered—

"She speaks with the Great Spirit."

Inside Barters was saying—

"Now, go!"

"And opening the door, he thrust her out just as fresh fuel was thrown on the fire.

She did not have to play the rôle. Her eyes were glazed with horror and saw nothing of the awed faces. Her benumbed faculties refused to register further shocks. The savages fell back as she tottered toward the fire, the light playing over blood-stained gown and the gory weapons she held before her. Like one who walks while asleep, she gained the fire, every savage eye following her slightest movement.

She held out her hands as though to warm them and relinquished her grasp on the knife and ax. To the superstitious watchers there was something highly ceremonial in the act. But some brain cell now opened and forced upon her consciousness a recollection of Barters' directions—a horse back of the cabin. With a little sigh she turned and walked toward the darkness.

The Delawares fell back, as mumbling and muttering, she left the fire. Several warriors skulked along abreast of her, but did so with humble deference and with a manner of offering her protection. She found the horse and climbed upon his back, but it was a warrior's hand that unfastened the rawhide. And with bowed head she rode south to the wilderness road.

Barters had hoped all the Indians would follow as she went to the horse. As the greater part of them remained before the cabin, silently waiting the return of their companions, he crawled beneath the bunk, nursing his long rifle at his side.

It was some time after the woman departed that the warriors entered the cabin. The light from the torches revealed a scene that beggared even their savage imagination. Deep, guttural sounds attested their awe and amazement. That a frail woman, even when touched by the Great Spirit, could work such gory havoc seemed incredible.

As they hastily removed the dead, eager to be clear of the spot, one of them found reason for fresh astonishment—the foot of a dead warrior protruding from beneath the bunk. He gaped in bewilderment. Eight had been carried forth and only eight were known to be slain. He stooped and seized the moccasin. A spurt of flame and an explosion sent them all in clamorous flight through the door—all but the warrior who had investigated.

THE express from Pitt found Ligonier in great excitement. The granddaughter of old man Ridge had arrived at the fort horseback in the middle of the night and she had with her Barters' dispatches. The horrors she passed through had temporarily affected her mind. When questioned by Lieutenant Blane she could only sob and say:

"He was very brave—very brave. He made me take the horse after the fight."

As Blane finished the express said:

"Gim'me your papers. Barters won't come for 'em. Send some men up the west branch o' the Kiskiminitas. They'll find him in a trader's shack, with a band o' dead Injuns afore him and more dead Injuns outside. I swung 'round that way to dodge the reds I reckoned would be filling up the road in this neighborhood.

"Lawd! what a sight! Him, old Barters, propped ag'in' a bunk, with a broken knife and a broken ax in his hands and his rifle across his lap—and twenty dead Delawares in the room and just outside. And only one killed with a bullet. They must 'a' jumped him in the cabin and he met 'em coming. He put up such a fight that they 'lowed he was mighty big medicine, for they didn't take his hair, and even placed his gun across his lap. It shows how scared they got when they dug off without stopping to bury their dead."

The lieutenant understood it all now. Lifting his hat, he softly said:

"She's right. He was very, very brave. He stayed behind so she could escape on the one horse. He must have been very terrible, for the Delawares to respect him. Could they have taken him alive I believe they would have spared him."

"Spared him?" blankly repeated the express, not fully comprehending what had taken place. "——Think Cleb Barters would take a favor from a Injun?"

And with a kick he sent his horse racing to the road to make up the time lost when Barters dropped out.

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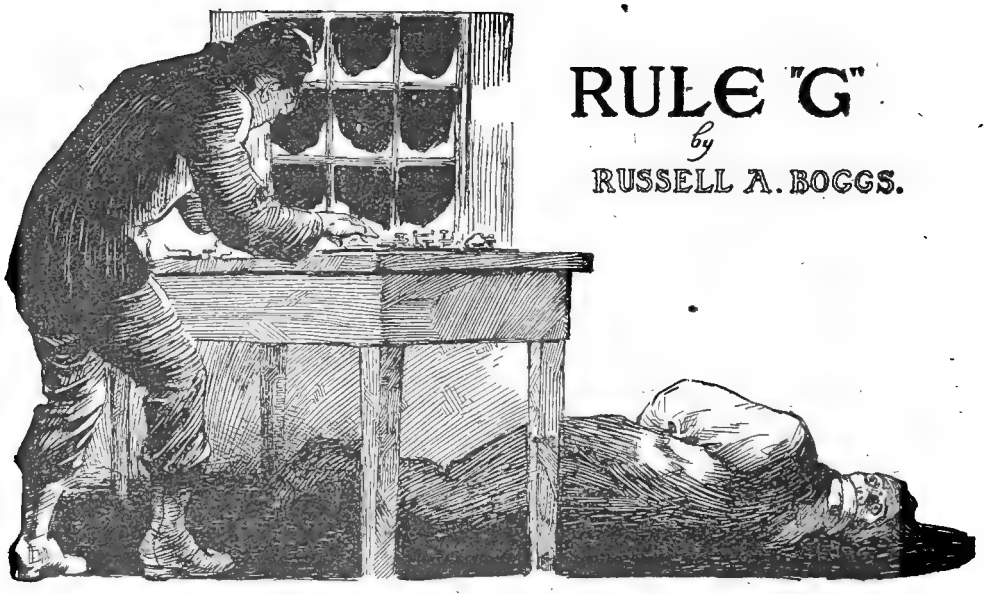

RULE "G"

by

RUSSELL A. BOGGS.

Author of "The Education of Mr. Giles," "Blaming It On Benny," etc.

"I'LL give you one more chance, Frazer," said the division operator. His eyes rested steadily upon young, sober-faced Con Frazer, seated at the other side of his desk.

Young Frazer looked up, hopefully—albeit a little shamefacedly. He said nothing, merely waiting expectantly.

"I shouldn't do it—as you know," went on the division operator gravely. "You know what the penalty is for infraction of the rule which forbids drinking—and you've broken that rule more than once. It's dangerous business, Frazer, this violating of Rule 'G'—dangerous not only for others, but for you, too. If you don't quit it you may some day find yourself with blood upon your hands—a thing that drives men crazy, and, sometimes, sets their own hands against themselves."

The division operator's voice was contained, deliberate, and his wise, experienced gray eyes dwelt unswervingly upon the younger man's face.

"I've seen that happen," he added.

He turned to look out through his office window for an instant, his gaze traveling over the flat roof of the train shed just without, and resting, finally, upon the long strips of shining rail beyond. He was a rather unique figure as an official, was Division Operator Merriman. There was nothing of the driver about him, nothing of the officious superior, but there was a quiet, earnest consideration for those in his charge; and he was the most respected official on the division.

A certain newly-appointed general officer—seeking to impress those about him with a proper sense of his own knowledge had once undertaken to chide Merriman for his gentle methods. Merriman had waited until the big man had finished.

"No," he had said—and his gray eyes had suddenly grown hard as flints—"no, that is not my way. I've got some pretty smart men in my department, men who know as much as I do, or more. And I know that they have troubles enough without my adding more. Therefore, as long as I get results I'll try to make it as pleasant for them as I can, instead of striving to make it harder. Lack of consideration, sir, is what breeds discontent."

And he had added the fact that if his methods were not satisfactory, entirely satisfactory, his resignation could be had, right then and there! It was not requested.

Merriman turned to Frazer again.

"It's a big risk I'm taking, Frazer," he said, "and, really, I have no right to do it. Yet, someway, I don't like to let you go; someway, I have faith in you. When you realize this: that if you get into trouble

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I'll be to blame, also, you'll understand just how much faith I have in you."

Once more he paused, peering for a little bit into the younger man's face; then, abruptly—

"But I'm willing to take that risk, Frazer, if you are." His eyes questioned.

A sudden warm glow of appreciation in Frazer's countenance replaced his somewhat embarrassed expression.

"I am!" he exclaimed, and his jaw set grimly. "If you let me have one more chance I'll show you that you made no mistake!"

"Good!" said Merriman, and tapped his desk with the palm of his hand. "And now—how about going to Rocky Cut?"

A single, fleeting look of wry disappointment passed over Frazer's face, and he glanced into his superior's eyes as if a little astonished and taken aback.

"It's wild—and lonely, I know," said Merriman as he read the other's thought, "but I believe it's the place. Try it there for a year—or until you feel that you are safe, have won out. Then tell me when you are ready to leave and I'll take you away." He leaned forward slightly. "How about it?"

"All right! I'll do it!" cried young Frazer, with sudden decision. "Send me there."

II

TWO travel-weary riders drew rein at the edge of the board platform which surrounded the little, two-story frame station at Rocky Cut. The station faced the valley to the south, and the shadows of the mountains lay all about, deep and long. Directly west the track hugged the foot of Barren Mountain for a quarter-mile where a narrow cut, or shelf, had been chiseled from its granite side; on the opposite side of the right-of-way, and thirty feet below, ran Silver Tip Creek, a rushing, hustling stream.

The face of the mountain rose abruptly above the steel rails, bare, bleak and threatening. Some ten years before an avalanche of snow and ice had roared down its frowning slope, carrying everything ahead of it; and catching an unfortunate freight train in its pathway, had hurled cars and all into the gorge of the stream below. As a safeguard against a repetition of that catastrophe a thick, high retaining wall of reinforced concrete now stood between the track and the mountain. Moreover, as a further precaution, out beyond the western end of the cut there was erected a distant-signal which, in case of another slide or impending danger, could be set at the stop position by controlling levers in the office at Rocky Cut station; this was the chief reason why there was now a station at Rocky Cut; at the time of the slide there had been none.

The two riders dismounted upon the platform and stretched their cramped limbs in the early Winter sunshine. Young Con Frazer, agent and operator, appeared in the station doorway, grinning at the unexpected and welcome company. There were often days when, except for the people on the trains, he saw no one.

The horsemen were tall, spare men, their eyes were pleasant, their manners were friendly.

"Why, hello!" said Con.

They returned his greeting affably.

"How's business?" added the black-eyed, younger horseman.

He was, apparently, not much over Con's age; and that was four and twenty.

Young Frazer's grin widened.

"I'm bored to death for lack of it," said he. "Come in and let me sell you a ticket—I've got some dandies! But, really, my hardest job is watching that cut."

"How's that?" queried the elder cavalier.

There were tinges of gray around the edge of hair that peeped out beneath the crown of his Stetson.

"Watching it for slides when the bad weather comes—which will be soon, now, I guess. Had a bad one there once." And Frazer told them about it.

The strangers—particularly the older one—contemplated the cut and the frowning mountain above it with interest.

"Yes," said the elder, nodding, "I remember some about that."

He continued to stare at the track and the wall and the forbidding precipice.

"Will you be catching No. 7, west?" asked Con of the other. "If you want to take her I'll have to be getting my flag out."

"No," said the black-eyed one, "we just stopped to stretch. We're ridin' south."

But he did not mention whence they came, nor whither bound; and Con, according to custom, of course did not inquire.

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"Say," added Black-eyes, "you haven't a newspaper you've read, have you? I haven't saw one for a week, and I'm plumb starved for news."

"Why sure," said Con. He stepped inside the office, and in a minute reappeared, a Denver daily in his hand.

"Here's yesterday's," he said. "It's the only one left. I used all my old ones this morning to start a fire."

Black-eyes took it eagerly and glanced swiftly over the head-lines. The columns of war news seemed to interest him most; and as he read them he suddenly chuckled.

"Say—if that ain't slick!"

"What is?" said his companion, half-absently, turning about from his contemplation.

"Why—them Italians and Austrians," said the younger, still reading.

"What about them?"

The reader reluctantly put his paper down.

"Why," he explained, "them Italians and Austrians up in the Alps are tumbling avalanches down over one another's heads by exploding big shells in the snow on the mountain sides above each other's trenches."

He seemed to find humor in the thought and he chuckled to himself again.

"My gosh!" he murmured, richly.

The older rider's eyes lit all at once, unseen by Frazer, as if a sudden thought had struck him; but the expression swiftly fled.

"Well," he said, "we better be driftin'."

The two climbed into their saddles and turned their horses' heads.

"I'll just keep this paper, if you don't mind?" said the younger.

"Sure," said Con. "Sorry you have to go so soon. So long!"

So the twain rode down the twisting valley, southward, leaving Con Frazer quite in ignorance as to the identity of his illustrious callers. Furthermore, when a bend in the hills shut the little station building from their sight, directly, the older man stopped his horse, and, half-turning about, for a long time looked back at Barren Mountain, motionless, a frown on his face.

"Come on," urged Black-eyes at last, impatiently.

His fellow-rider did not move.

"Read your paper," he said, shortly.

So the younger man, familiar with his companion's ways, did so. He had not been reading long when the elder slapped himself on the leg, abruptly.

"I've got it!" he ejaculated.

"I bet," said Black-eyes, dryly.

The thinker swung around, his eyes gleaming.

"This is no joke," he said. "Listen!"

And he told his fellow-rider what he had. Moreover, as he talked the incredulity upon the younger man's face quickly faded, and eagerness and desire crept into his countenance as he listened, all attention.

"But you're so darned realistic, Steve!" he cried when the elder paused. "Why not just throw some logs across the track and wave a red lantern?"

"Yes, and as quick as they see the logs they'll know what's up and give us all kinds of trouble, especially in these new steel cars they're using.

"No sir, there being but two of us we got to work quick and take 'em clear off their guard. A slide across the track will do that. They'll just pile off, express messengers and all, to look it over and see what's the matter. I know the messengers ain't supposed to do it, but you'll see! They'll not have a suspicion when they see a slide there!"

"You old son-of-a-gun, I believe you're right!" cried the younger, with admiration.

"I know this country like a book," went on Steve, "and I know a place to hide out in back in the hills where they couldn't find us in a thousand years. We'll wait till some good night when she's snowin' like blazes; that'll cover our tracks. Then we'll try it! What say, Gene?"

"We will—by thunder!" Gene slapped his own thigh, royally. "But what about the agent at the station?"

"He seems like a nice young man," said Steve soberly, though his eyes twinkled, "and he certainly gave us some awful good information. Consequently—" he dwelt deliciously over the word, in rare good humor, a very devil dancing in his eye—"consequently we'll try not to be harsh. One of us will just have to slip up there quietly and rope him up snug, and they can rescue him after it's all over."

He shook his reins.

"Come along!" he said. "We're going south. But not too far—just now!"

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III

FOR three days it had been snowing, without wind, a heavy, wet snow that settled solidly into the valleys and clung to the trees and the sides of the mountains. Now, on the third day, about noon, the white flakes had ceased to fall and for a while a gentle breeze had swept up the valley; then about four o'clock the breeze had all at once died away, and the big, heavy flakes had commenced to fall again as if there had been no break in their precipitation.

Con Frazer, about 7 P. M., stirred the embers of the fire in his office stove and poured in a little more coal. This snow, the first hard one of the Winter, would throw all the trains late. No. 7, westbound, was two hours overdue now; but she had been reported out of Blairs at 6:50, and that should bring her to Rocky Cut around 7:25. And Con had heard the dispatcher tell some one that No. 18, the eastbound solid express which carried no passengers, due to pass Rocky Cut at 8:10 P. M., would be at least thirty minutes behind schedule, perhaps more.

Con drew his chair up to the round stove and settled down into a semi-revery until No. 7 should come. He had no prospective business with the train. But she might, accidentally, bring him a passenger, or a little expressage for some settler out in the surrounding wilderness.

It was a year and three months since Division Operator Merriman had sent Frazer here to Rocky Cut—fifteen long months of loneliness and exile. To the east, the closest station was Blairs, down among the foothills, nine miles distant; to the west the nearest was Narrows, ten miles away in the mountains. At Rocky Cut there was nothing but the little depot and the agent—not another soul or habitation. Frazer batched for himself, cooking and sleeping in the two rooms overhead, built above the office and small waiting-room. Besides his telegraph work he had almost nothing to do; the watching for slides was more or less perfunctory since the retaining wall had been built.

And Merriman had been right in his diagnosis. For in those fifteen months Con Frazer had fought and won over himself. He felt that he had, and yet, in some way, he was a little bit afraid to confront the test—a little fearful that he might not be strong enough. Hence he had delayed his request to be relieved and to be transferred, and had hung on at Rocky Cut. He tingled, sometimes, with longing for the test—and to be away.

Twenty-five minutes dragged by; and then, above the clatter of his telegraph instruments, Con heard No. 7 whistle for the block, then whistle to stop. He took up his sheets of clearance and waded out through the snow on the platform to meet her.

No. 7, however, did not come to a full stop. As she slowly rolled in an express messenger stuck his head out from the express car door.

"Here's a package!" he shouted. "Watch it—booze—in glass!"

He dropped the sealed pasteboard box into Frazer's arms as he drifted past, grinned, then waved the highball sign to the baggagemaster, who promptly pulled the cord, and No. 7 gathered up speed, her windows gleaming in the darkness.

Frazer paused for a second on the step of his waiting-room door, gazing after the disappearing lights of the train, and absently kicking at the balls of snow caked to the soles of his shoes. Still looking up the track, he shoved the door open, stepped inside—and his treacherous, snowy heels skidded out from under him. He flung his arms up to regain his balance—and the pasteboard box went flying! There was the rattle of breaking glass, and a thin liquid spread out over the floor!

"I'll be swizzled!" exclaimed Con ruefully as he regained his equilibrium. He stared down at the ill-fated package.

"And after that fellow warning me, too!"

He stooped to pick the parcel up, and a familiar odor struck his nostrils. Motionless, he sniffed sharply for an instant, his every nerve tense and straining. Here was the test, come to seek him out! Deeply he inhaled. And then suddenly he straightened himself and laughed, long and loud.

Grinning, he tore the package open. Two glass, gallon jugs had been within. Now one was shattered; but the other, miraculously, was still unharmed. He jerked the cork from it, raised it to his lips. . . .

For a long minute he held it there; then he lowered it—untouched! He stepped to the rear window, flung the sash up; he turned, swept the broken fragments and

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the full jug into his arms; and then, reckless of ownership, he heaved the whole litter far out of the window.

"Get out!" he cried, exultantly. "I'm through with you—for good!"

He stretched his arms above his head in a great gesture of triumph and laughed in his exultation. This thing which he had been dreading . . . How foolish . . . How ridiculously easy. . . .

All at once the little station seemed stuffy and close. He must get outside where he'd have room to expand and to let his nerves cool off. He wanted to shout in his joy, and in the knowledge that on the morrow he could ask Merriman for his transfer, unafraid.

He "O.S.'d" No. 7, then flung himself out into the snow, and, scarcely aware of where he went, plowed down the track, westward. The big, wet flakes brushed his cheeks, drifting and eddying about him.

Con reached the edge of the cut, more composed, and suddenly stopped. On his right Barren Mountain loomed high above him, silent and ominous, its mighty face covered deep with the heavy snow, waiting for a touch to start the mass off and to send it roaring down the slope. Still, there was the big retaining wall, guaranteed to withstand all shocks.

"Safe enough, I guess," said Con to himself. "And I think I'll go back."

He faced about—and stopped short. From somewhere over behind the wall there came a sound, faint and undefinable, but which, someway, seemed to him like the soft whinny of a horse. He listened, alertly, undecided; and finally, as the sound was not repeated, he stepped over and around the end of the wall.

But within the small radius of his vision he could see nothing suspicious; and, although he listened again for some time, he could hear nothing.

"Mistaken—must be hearing things!" he at last concluded. "But it certainly sounded—Moses!"

He dropped flat into the snow, close up against the end of the wall.

A tall figure, vaguely visible, had suddenly appeared before him, coming in his direction. The approaching man, indistinct, and looking grotesquely large through the snow and darkness, stumbled silently past within twenty feet of Frazer; he made his way to the track, and headed toward the depot whose lights, some two hundred yards distant, glowed dimly.

Con stared after the plodding man, filled with surprise and wonder at who could be out in the snow storm at this time of night, and in this forsaken, rough country, and at what he could want. Something strangely furtive in the man's manner seemed, instinctively, to have warned Frazer, and he had crouched down, silent, smothering his first impulse to hail the stranger. For only a few seconds he stood reasoning, then, as the tall figure faded into the snow, he leaped to his feet.

"We'll see!" said Con, and followed after.

When the man ahead neared the station he paused just outside the shafts of light that streamed from the windows, and for a little time appeared to be fumbling with something around his head. Then he stepped forward, close to the front window of the little office, and peered in, slyly. Con had also halted, and now, watching tensely, he saw that the man wore a black mask over his face.

"Masked!" ejaculated Con, softly. "And looking for me! Now what in the name——!"

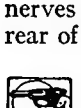
A confused rush of thoughts and conjectures poured through his head. Surely the fellow would know that in this uninhabited place there would not be much of value in the station. Then, too, there was something vaguely familiar about the man—the strong jaw, or his general appearance. . . He puzzled over it.

Evidently the man's glimpse into the office had disappointed him. He drew his head back from the window for a little bit; then he peeped through again, longer this time. And when, apparently, this view, too, was fruitless, he slipped over to the waiting-room and peered in that window. This, also, without result, and finally he withdrew his head from there and stepped close to the building, under the eaves, standing irresolutely in the shadows.

Con Frazer aroused himself.

"He's after no good!" he said.

He thought swiftly for a moment, his nerves aquiver. Then he slid around to the rear of the station.



THERE was a small coal-house standing just in back of the depot. Con slipped the door of this shed open noiselessly, and picked up the coal

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shovel which lay just inside. It was the only available weapon to hand.

"Desperate deeds, desperate remedies!" he muttered. He crept around the end of the station toward which the stranger's back had been turned.

The masked man under the eaves bent forward for another peep through the office window. With a clang something terrific descended upon his head; and he fell, stunned, into the snow!

"With best wishes!" cried Con, dropping his shovel.

He leaped upon the fallen man, jerked an automatic pistol from his belt, ran his fingers over him for other weapons, found another pistol strapped in the hollow under the man's arm, took it, and ripped the mask off.

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Con. He recognized the younger of the two horsemen who had stopped at Rocky Cut three weeks before. "No wonder I thought I knew you."

Frazer hurried into the office, looking for something with which to secure his captive. A coil of flexible, insulated wire hanging on the wall was the only thing he could find. With a pair of pliers he cut off a length, went out, and bound the man's hands behind his back. The captive began to show signs of returning consciousness; and, just as Con completed twisting the bonds, he opened his eyes, dazedly.

"Wake up, friend!" said Con. "And I'll lend you another paper!"

Black-eyes blinked bewilderedly. He strained at his arms, and sudden realization that his hands were tied seemed to bring him to his senses completely.

"Judas Priest!" he said, batting his eyes, and began to curse, softly.

"Exactly," said Con. "And now what? What's the idea of this mask, and all these pistols, and all this secrecy?"

The bound one regarded Con gravely.

"The devil!" he said. Astonishment and chagrin seemed to limit his speech, so far, to mere expressions.

"I thought you went south," said Con. "What do you want up north? And your friend—where is——"

A roaring blast ripped through the night from somewhere down in the cut—a dull, heavy boom that cut short Frazer's words and that shook the earth beneath his feet. Open-mouthed, he stared at his captive; and almost instantly there followed another blast, this one apparently from somewhere up on Barren Mountain. The report of the concussions died away, and then there came to their ears a grinding, crunching sound, swiftly increasing in volume, a sound that mounted to a terrible, thundering growl, and that, starting up on the mountain, seemed to sweep down into the cut with a furious, terrifying swish. There came a gigantic thump—then silence.

"The slide!" gasped Con, his eyes glued to the other's face.

He seemed to perceive something mocking there in the reckless eyes. There was something ominous in those two explosions and the grinding crush that followed—something queer and unexplainable. And back in Con's brain some thought seemed to be struggling for expression, some forgotten thought that would explain it.

"But why the explosions?" said Con, unconsciously aloud.

The mocking light in the black eyes flamed up more intensely and a faint, enigmatical smile came to the taunting lips. Frowning, Con gazed at him—and suddenly the thing back in his head snapped into life, and some of the truth flashed upon him.

"Say—if that ain't slick!" cried Con, his lips repeating the remembered expression. "Shells in the Alps! You devils! You've blasted the wall and put another blast on the slope to start the slide!"

He bent over his captive.

"Am I right?" he cried, glaring at the prisoner as comprehension burst upon him. "You're trying to hold up No. 18!"

Con seized the man by the coat collar.

"Get up," he commanded sharply, "and into the office! Quick!"

He shoved his prisoner inside ahead of him, thoughts and plans buzzing in his head. He didn't know how many helpers the bandit had—maybe only his former companion, maybe more—he'd have to take a chance on that.

"Lie down—face to the floor!" ordered Con.

The robber's own pistol emphasized the words, and when the man had complied Con quickly bound his feet with another piece of the insulated wire; and with a handkerchief he made a gag, thrust it into the robber's mouth, and knotted it tightly.

"Now be good!" said Con, springing to his feet. He'd have to hurry, as his

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prisoner's pals, if he had any, might grow suspicious and come to investigate.

THE wires had all stopped clicking —as Con had expected to find. The blasting of the wall and the sweep of the slide out over the tracks had brought the poles and wires down. He grabbed the levers that controlled the distant-signal at the other side of the cut. He could not budge them. The slide had jammed the wires that led to it, too.

"Everything gone!" exclaimed Con.

He reached up to the little switchboard above his telegraph table, took a brass plug, and thrust it into the ground-wire strip, grounding the train wire on the west side; "DR," the dispatcher's office, was east of Rocky Cut. The wire closed!

"DR—DR—RC—" he called swiftly.

"I—DR," snapped the answer.

"This is RC (Rocky Cut)," spelled Con with flying fingers. "Train robbers have blown hole in wall of cut and by blasting have shot a slide down the mountain and through the hole. Are trying to hold up No. 18. Slide has knocked all wires down—I have a ground on this—none of 'em any good west. Can't even set levers on distant-signal—won't work—jammed. I've one bandit tied up here in station, but don't know how many are down in the cut!"

"Good Lord! Man—what can we do?"

The stuttering sounder betokened the dispatcher's agitation; the instrument clicked helplessly for an instant, as if he could not form words or thoughts.

"How is 18?" flashed Con.

"She's late—ought to make Narrows by 8:35. But that won't help—we can't reach her there with these wires down!"

Con glanced quickly at the clock. It was just 8:10. That would give him just twenty-five minutes of grace before the train would reach Narrows! If he could make it in that time. . . He opened the key.

"I've a scheme!" he once more flashed. "I'm going to take an instrument and see if I can make it to the other side of the slide, connect on to the broken wires there, get Narrows, and have him hold 18. Believe I can make it if I can get by without the hold-up men seeing me. Anyway, I guess it's our only hope!"

"Go to it, boy—quick!" clicked the sounder as the dispatcher grasped the plan. "You're right—it's the only chance. There are no other wires into Narrows and even if we could reach around the slide from here we couldn't get hold of them. Watch yourself—it'll be dangerous! But it's up to you—18 has a rich load on tonight—she'll be trying to make up some time if she gets by Narrows, so if you fail it'll be all off—she'll plow into that slide head-on!"

"I'm off!" said Con, and shut the key.

From his stationary cupboard he took an extra emergency instrument, then with the pliers he cut two long strands from the coil of insulated wire, and peeled the insulation from the ends of the lengths. He connected an end of each piece to the instrument, and bound it to his body by wrapping the wire around him, thus leaving his arms free. One of his captive's pistols he dropped into his pocket, the other he clutched in his hand.

The bandit, who had twisted himself over on his side, stared at Frazer from the floor, his eyes questioning.

"I'll see you later!" Con said to him, and put out the lights.

He locked the office and the waiting-room doors, then plunged down the track.

He went carefully, yet with all possible speed. The time was short, and he had to sacrifice something of caution for haste, else his effort would be vain. He counted on the snow and the darkness to cover his approach; the greatest peril, he figured, would come when he reached the slide.

Eyes straining, nerves taut, his heart sinking at every shadow, he came to the end of the cut. He surged ahead, and, midway through the cut, the avalanche across the track confronted him.

A great, jagged hole was faintly discernible in the thick wall, and through it the slide had plunged out and over the right-of-way. The mass of packed snow and boulders rose twenty feet above Con's head, clear from the wall to the edge of the steep gully through which Silver Tip Creek ran. There was no way around. He'd have to climb over, and there, most likely, the danger lay.

"Now!" breathed Con, and without delay he scrambled upward.

He reached the crest, panting. He had one glimpse of what he took to be the other edge of the long tongue of snow, thirty feet beyond him. A man's voice came from over near the wall, calling carefully:

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"Who is it? Gene? Where have you been so——"

Con threw himself toward the opposite edge of the slide.

A flash split through the snow-flakes—and Con answered it. Another came—and Con spun half around as something burned his side beneath his right arm. He nearly fell; but he regained his footing, and once more fired at the point from whence the flame had flared.

He felt suddenly dizzy, and he sort of waited, as if expecting another shot. But, strangely, none came! He struggled onward—and went sliding and tumbling down the western face of the slide.

He sat up, looking around for the fallen telegraph pole; and there, right before his eyes, lay a tangle of cross-arms and wires, the pole having been caught by the edge of the mass as it poured from the hole in the wall, and crushed down across the track.

Con got to his feet, uncertainly, wavering a little on his legs, every move bringing a stab of pain to his chest. The train wire, he knew, was the one on the outside pin on the lowest cross-arm.

He found it, working frantically, expecting every second to bring another shot out of the darkness; thinking it was strange it did not come, and wondered why.

"Just a minute or two more!" he muttered. "Just a minute or two!" After that he wouldn't care.

With his pliers he had cut the wire and dragged it clear of the tangled jumble. Now he unloosened the instrument from about him and connected one of the insulated strands to the end of the train wire. He fumbled in the snow and twisted the end of the other strand from his instrument around one of the steel rails for a ground, and, then, his brain whirling, crouching in the snow, he steadied the instrument on his knee and tried it.

"Thank God!" he muttered.

The sounder stood closed! He opened the key.

"NR—NR (Narrows)," he called, holding his breath, "9—NR—NR—RC——"

The wire opened! He released his pent-up breath with something like a groan.

"I—NR," spelled the sounder.

"Is 18 there yet—quick!"

"No—she's just coming though."

The joy of that steeled Con's reeling senses for an instant.

"Hold her," Con felt himself get suddenly faint again as the reaction set in. "Slide in the cut at RC—" he spaced the words with numb, uncertain fingers—"train robbers waiting—" everything was black before him. "Hold——"

The instrument fell from Con's grasp, and he rolled over, gently, into the snow.

CON FRAZER opened his heavy eyes. Some one was trying to pour a burning liquid down his throat. He sat up, gagging and coughing, and waved the bottle aside.

He looked around in bewilderment, and saw a circle of men standing about him, lanterns and rifles in their hands. Fifty feet away a light engine stood, hissing softly. His chest hurt. Somebody's knee supported his back, and he relaxed against it. He looked up, and here he saw the lights reflected on the faces of old friends—Janvers, agent at Narrows, Engineer Miller and Conductor Hopkins among them. And there—yes, there was Division Operator Merriman.

"Feel better?" some one asked. "You'll be all right soon."

"Why—yes," he answered, perplexed.

He glanced around again, frowning. His eye lit on a telegraph instrument lying in the snow, close beside him. He stared at it an instant—and all at once recollection came upon him. He leaned forward.

"Then I was in time—they held 18?" he said, eagerly.

"Sure boy!" It was Merriman who answered; he knelt down beside Frazer. "I was on 18 myself. So we just gathered up a little bunch and came down on the light engine to round up these bandits. But we found you'd attended to that, too."

"How so?" asked Con.

"We found him over by the wall. You'd nicked his crown—not bad, but enough to lay him out!"

Con smiled the best he could. That was why there had been no more shots.

"Luck," he said. "Plain luck! There's another one, too, tied up in the station."

"What! Well—I'll be blowed!"

The light in Merriman's eyes deepened to a burning glow; he bent closer.

"However did you do it?" he cried.

Con Frazer's smile widened.

"By observing 'Rule G,'" he answered. "And I'm ready for that transfer!"

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HIDDEN TRAILS

A FIVE-PART STORY
PART III

BY WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

Author of "Paradise Bend," "Longhorns," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

IN THE longhorn country, when one gentleman bestows baneful glances upon another, it behooves the innocent bystander to be vigilant.

So when Johnny Ramsay, of the Cross-in-a-box, observed a red-headed individual glance sourly in through the door of the Happy Heart Saloon at a brown-bearded stranger drinking at the bar, he sat upright. A few minutes later the red-head entered and sat in at a game of poker.

One of the players being forced to retire, the red-head invited Brown-beard to take the empty place. Brown-beard would rather not. Red-head insisted and insinuated. Brown-beard strode to the table and sat down.

The deal passed around the table and came to Brown-beard. As he flipped the first card to the red-head, the latter's gun flashed while he sent the cards flying. Brown-beard sank in a heap.

"He tried to skin us, the —— tinhorn! Didya see him deal from the bottom of the deck?" exclaimed the red-head indignantly.

No one had—but no one could prove otherwise. "Slim" Berdan, the town marshal, settled the case quickly.

"Stranger," said he, "yuh got twenty minutes to pull yore freight out o' Farewell, or we'll hang yuh some."

Before the body was buried Jake Rule, Sheriff of Fort Creek County, arrived and identified the dead man as Mat Neville, a Wells-Fargo detective, a man who had never been known to cheat in his life.

CREAK and jangle! Hoofbeat and bump! The through stage from Paradise Bend to Marysville pulled in with the guard killed and "Whisky" Jim, the driver, creased on the head.

"Road-agents again," he explained simply. This was the the tenth time he had been stopped.

An hour later Bill Stahl, Sheriff of Sunset County, arrived and posted notices to the effect that the Territory would pay one thousand dollars apiece for the delivery, dead or alive, of the bandits who were operating in Sunset County. The Wells-Fargo Company duplicated the offer.

At Sheriff Rule's home, Johnny interviewed both Rule and Sheriff Stahl, but learned nothing more of the road-agents.

"Yeah, she sounds a heap interestin'. I guess I'll just go after that reward," he concluded.

Then entered smilingly Racey Dawson and Telescope Laguerre.

"We heard yuh through the window," they announced, "an' we decided to go with yuh, so we can sort o' look after yuh an'horn in on the two thousand wheels a bandit."

So they laid their plans. The sheriffs were to tell nothing of the scheme to any one, but just to greet the three casually as before. Two of the trio were to secure jobs as stray men, probably from "Scotty" Mackenzie, of the Flying-M; the third was to work at the stage depot. Already they were counting the reward-money.

Two days later the three met again and Johnny Ramsay took the road to Paradise Bend, the others to follow at intervals.

As he was picking his way along a difficult trail three mornings later, three shots cracked ahead of him. Where the trail turned into a grove of cottonwoods he found their cause—two dead men in a buckboard, and a dead horse.

In the distance three riders were rapidly fording a stream. Johnny aimed and fired, but the horses, two chestnuts and a black-tail dun, were already out of range.

The murdered men he found had been robbed. Just as Johnny discovered the place from which

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they had been ambushed, hoofbeats sounded on the road. He drew into the bushes. When the carefully dressed rider drew up, Johnny stepped from his place of concealment.

Together they examined the bodies. Then the stranger suggested:

"We might as well go back to the Bend together. They've got too much of a start to do anything."

"Howdja know I'm goin' to the Bend, anyhow?" questioned Johnny.

"This is how," came the answer and he stared into the twin-barrels of the stranger's Derringer.

Johnny, disarmed, riding in front, the Derringer in the rear, they rode to Paradise Bend.

WHEN the town was reached the captor announced he had caught a road-agent redhanded.

"I'll getcha my rope," yelled a citizen and the crowd pressed forward.

While Johnny was trying to yell his explanations, "Soapy" Ragsdale and Jim Mace, two old friends of his, edged their way forward and took their places by his side.

"I got my finger on the trigger," Ragsdale announced, pointing his carbine. "I don't like this here bellerin' for ropes an' I don't give a —— who knows it."

The crowd remained at a respectful distance.

Then arrived the marshal who ordered a trial and picked Dave Dusenbury's store as the courtroom.

Constituting himself judge, the marshal chose twleve jurors, although he declared "a jury ain't really necessary," and proceeded to the trial.

While every window of the store was jammed with people, Harry Slay, the man who had brought Johnny into town, told his story, twisting fact and argument so cunningly that the two appeared as one.

But the light came to Johnny.

By working cartridges through his rifle he proved that if he had fired the shots, the shell cases must be nicked, for all that passed through his gun came out that way. Next he declared that the empty shells, if they had been thrown out, would be found in the ambush—without a nick. One nicked shell would be where he had thrown it after shooting at the horsemen.

In conclusion he declared that if the bullets were dug out of the wounds they would be found to be 38's while his were 45-90's.

But the marshal and jury did not want to lose time investigating. A murmur arose. The marshal coughed, fingered his six-shooter and said:

"Gents, y'all heard what Harry Slay said. Y'all heard what this feller said. What do you say?"

"Yes, gents, what do you say?" drawled a voice from the doorway.

Scotty Mackenzie and eight of the Flying-M riders pressed in and stood by Johnny's side.

"Gents, yuh was goin' to say somethin'. What was it?" reminded Scotty.

"They was a-goin' to adjourn over to Yaller Medicine Crick to look at some evidence," put in the marshal.

"Oh yeah," said Scotty. "Guess we'll trail along. Yuh see I was standin' in that doorway a good ten minutes before anybody saw me."

AT THE scene of the murder they found the cartridge shells behind a boulder, as Johnny had foretold, unscratched. And a bullet dug from one of the bodies proved to be a 40-65.

"I guess that pretty near clears the cat-hop," suggested Scotty.

"Shore it does," affirmed the marshal, and Slay pronounced his satisfaction.

During the ride back to town Johnny engaged himself and Laguerre to Scotty as stray men, explaining his purpose.

The next day Scotty had something worth while, a battered silver watch which had once belonged to the murdered Bill Homan.

"I found her at the edge o' the quicksand I've been fencin'," he explained. "An' there wasn't a hoofmark or heelmark within forty feet. I'm tellin' yuh, Johnny, that this timepiece was throwed from across the river some time during the night."

"An' she shore goes to show the road-agents live in town or near it," agreed Johnny.

That evening on his way to Slay's Broken Dollar Saloon, Johnny stumbled and fell in the yard of the stage depot, seventy yards away.

Before he could get out of the way, the back door of the saloon opened and a woman, Mrs. Lotta Wallace, Slay's widowed sister, stepped into the yard.

"My God, what a life! I wish I were dead!" she moaned to herself.

Johnny was destined to see more of Mrs. Wallace. The next afternoon when he was sitting with Dorothy Burr, Slay came up to take her riding, and Mrs. Wallace, who accompanied him, asked Johnny to spend the afternoon at her home—where Johnny learned some things—the taste of "Texas Pete" mixed by herself, and the art of lighting two cigarets with one match.

He became the envy of the town, for he was the only man she had ever let come to see her—and Mrs. Wallace was a beauty.

AT THE scene of the murder, Laguerre and Johnny examined the ground. At the conclusion Telescope summed up:

"We know dat one dese men use de 40-65 Winchestaire, two pony is de good-nature chestnut un one is de long-leg, vicious, black-tail dun. Dere can not be many pony lak dees hoss."

That evening Racey Dawson came into town full of news.

Another murder had been committed at Farewell. Masked riders had ridden into town at night and shot up Slim Berdan, deputy sheriff, and Lute Holloway, the latter fatally. Jake Rule and a posse were hunting the slayers.

But what interested Johnny most was that one of the murderers used a 40-65. And one rode a light-colored horse—possibly a black-tail dun.

The next day Johnny and Telescope were loudly hired by Scotty at the Flying-M.

And when they reached the Bend, Racey was in charge at the stage depot, having secured the position by whipping "Skinny" Devinney the former occupant.

There they left him, while they rode on to Rocket.

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CHAPTER XIII

RIDERS AT ROCKET

JOHNNY'S face was not wearing its usual expression of cheer and well-being as its owner rode the trail to Rocket. At times he reddened and shifted uncomfortably in the saddle. For the voice of the turtle and the squawk of Mrs. Carey's chicken kept tingling in his ears. It did not alleviate his sense of oppression that Miss Burr had passed unseen while he dallied with Mrs. Wallace. Dorothy would surely think he had meant to slight her. Of course she would. He knew girls possessed the objectionable habit of reasoning things out the wrong way. Not that it made any real difference. Why should it?

"W'at you swear to —— for all tam?" inquired the mildly curious half-breed.

"—— hot," was the sole explanation he got from Johnny.

Late in the evening they reached that collection of two dozen houses, three saloons, one store, and one hotel, known as Rocket. They were forced to awaken Dave Sinclair, the hotel-keeper. But he received them joyfully, for they were friends, and set before them cold beans and fried ham.

"Hear about the shootin' down at Farewell?" asked Dave, humanly anxious to tell a good story.

"Yeah," Johnny replied.

"Tough on Lute," said the disappointed Dave, "but Whisky tells me Slim'll pull through all fine an' dandy. Good feller Slim."

"She ees all dat," averred Laguerre.

"How's tricks, Dave?" Thus Johnny, between stuffed mouthfuls,

"Don't do no good to kick."

"Many folks stoppin' here?"

"Not so many. Had Bale Harper for a week an' a young feller from the Cross-in-a-box—leastwise he was ridin' that brand—for a night. But both of 'em drifted north together. There ain't nobody but me here now, an' you fellers. Guess that coffee'd oughta be about b'iled. Shore. Here she is."

"That wall eye o' Bale's gives me the creeps," observed Johnny, spading in the sugar.

"She is kind o' gloomersome. Always lookin' where he ain't, Bale is. I've heard he can shoot a few with a Winchester, but damfino how he does it, less'n he aims with both eyes an' strikes an' average before he cuts loose."

"Bale's got a li'l ranch some'ers, ain' he?" hazarded Johnny.

"Shore has, him an' Spill together," affirmed the guileless Dave. "Some'ers back o' the Medicine Mountains on Dry Creek."

"She ain't much of an outfit, I guess."

"Not much. Just a few cows an' hosses. They don't need steady lookin' after."

"Guess that suits Bale."

"Shore. He ain't there a whole lot. Aw, he's like his brother Spill—too strong to work. How's Scotty Mackenzie?"

"Same old silvertip. Got the notion now, he has, that a black-tail dun is the only color o' hoss worth cinchin' a hull on. Course a black-tail dun is a tough strong color, but she ain't the only hoss in the world by a jugful. Me personal I think a heap o' the chestnut with a black stripe. Any black-tail duns 'round here, Dave?"

"Ain't seen a black-tail dun in two years. A buck was ridin' that one."

"Injun, hey? Stallion, was he? Old?"

"Mare, an' young."

"That's just as good. Maybe Mister Warwhoop 'ud sell. What was his name?"

"Black Bear."

"Fort Yardley Reservation?"

"I guess. You ain't thinkin' o' ridin' there, are yuh?"

"I ain't makin' a point of it, but if I'm ever over toward the Hatchet Creek country I'll shorely look up Mister Black Bear an' see will he sell. Likely he has though—if she was a good hoss."

"She was that all right—full o' life like a charge o' giant. Droppin' the rein never did to anchor her. Black Bear used to carry a rope for that special."

"He did, huh? Must 'a' been a reg'lar hoss. Coffee-pot dry, Dave?"

Thuddy-thud, thuddy-thud, a pony was being loped along the trail from the south. Before Johnny finished filling his cup the pony had stopped in front of the hotel. There was no immediate sound of the rider's dismounting, and Johnny saw that the man was looking into the dining-room through the open doorway. The horse moved forward a step or two.

"Lookin' through the window now," Johnny told himself, stirring rapidly. "He shore is one careful gent."

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Twenty seconds later there was a creak and a thump as the cautious one dismounted. He entered with spurs a-jingle, hooked out a chair with his toe and plumped himself down opposite Johnny. The latter's nerves were under too excellent control to permit a start of surprise. He looked pleasantly instead into the face of the tall red-headed stranger who had killed Mat Neville.

"Howdy, gents," nodded the red-head to the three men, displaying as he slightly smiled the canines at the left side of his mouth. "I'm in luck. I shore never expected to get anythin' to eat at this time o' night."

"Yore expectations may be right at that," said Dave Sinclair sourly.

"Oh, I got money."

The stranger laughed in sinister fashion and spun a silver dollar on the oilcloth. His eyes gleamed yellowly in the shadow of his high-crowned white hat.

"I'd shore like some hot coffee," he added softly. "Stranger—" to Johnny—"will yuh shove them beans this way so they'll be all ready when my plate an' trimmin's arrive."

"This here runnin' a hotel ain't a business," gloomed Dave on his way to the kitchen, "it's a exercise."

The red-head winked solemnly at Johnny and Laguerre and planted bony elbows on the table.

"Cool night," he remarked genially, smiling his dog-toothed smile, turning his blank, fixed stare on Johnny.

The eyelids dropped a trifle. The man passed a hand across his hairless face.

"—— cool night," he added, and began to spoon beans from the dish to his plate.

Johnny wondered whether the red-head had recognized him and Laguerre. He determined to find out.

"She's a long ride from Farewell kind o'," observed Johnny.

"Shore," said the red-head, looking up from his plate, "I recognized yuh—both of yuh. I don't forget faces. Can't afford to. Yuh'll notice I'm keepin' away from Farewell—now."

"Meanin'?" Johnny asked easily.

"Meanin' that I might come back. Yuh never can tell."

"That's right. Yuh can't."

Johnny and Laguerre left the red-head to his beans and departed bedward. In whispers, at the open window of their room, they debated the significance of the red-head's arrival. Laguerre was of the opinion that it disposed of Johnny's theory that the man had been concerned in the murder of Lute Holloway, and the wounding of the marshal.

"Eef she was meex up een dat she was not come w'ere de deputy can fin' heem," pronounced the half-breed.

"That's just what he would do," declared Johnny. "He's no fool, an besides he dunno he's suspected."

"W'y she not know? You jus' say she was no fool. She guess eet easy, I tell you."

Thus they argued in a circle, after the fashion of detectives, amateur and professional, and each went to bed convinced that the other fellow did not know what he was talking about.

In the morning Johnny was up very betimes. He first visted the barroom, where, in a corner, the red-head's saddle lay. Johnny dragged the Winchester from the worn scabbard under the off fender, found the caliber to be 45-90, and disappointedly slid the rifle back. Then he went to the corral and carefully inspected the red-head's horse, an unbranded blue, the same animal on which he had ridden away from Farewell. With due consideration for eyes, prying and otherwise, Johnny, while apparently having great difficulty in bridling his own astonished pony, forced the red-head's blue to skip briskly hither and yon.

Clumsily Johnny buckled the throat-latch and reached one hand down into a side pocket of his trousers. When he withdrew the hand, a handkerchief and several pieces of small change came with it. The handkerchief went to wipe his face. The small change bounded gaily in all directions. Swearing heartily, Johnny stooped and set about retrieving his wealth. When the last coin was in his pocket and he straightened he had an excellent working knowledge of the size, shape and appearance of the four shoe-marks of the brandless blue.

In order to carry out the illusion he threw on and cinched his saddle and led his horse to the hitching-rail in front of the hotel. Then he went in to breakfast. The red-head, his mouth a-yawn, came down as Johnny and Laguerre were finishing.

"Goin' my way, gents?" he asked, rubbing his tousled red hair.

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"If yo're goin' south," Johnny said smilelessly.

"Now that's shore a calamity," mourned the other. "I'm travelin' north, but I shore hoped for company."

WHILE Laguerre was catching up his mount Johnny sat slouched in his saddle and smoked and watched an approaching dust-cloud on the trail they were to take. By the time Laguerre was mounted Johnny saw within the dust-cloud the hazy outlines of three horsemen.

"Looks like Bill Stahl's hoss?" suggested Johnny.

"She ees Beel Stahl," declared Laguerre.

Humanly curious, they waited in front of the hotel.

"Jack Murgatroyd, too," said Johnny.

Murgatroyd was one of the sheriff's two deputies, a silent, swarthy man with eyes small and bright as black beads.

"The middle one's wearin' the come-alongs," amplified Johnny. "Know him?"

Laguerre shook his head. The trio rode up and the sheriff and his deputy dismounted. The officers nodded and gave brief greeting to the two stray men and turned to help down their handcuffed prisoner. Before the three could enter the hotel Johnny contrived to catch the sheriff's eye.

"Take him in an' give him his breakfast, Jack," said the sheriff instantly. "I'll be in later."

Sheriff Stahl picked up the bridles of the three horses and led them 'round the corner of the hotel.

"Gimme a lift, will yuh, Johnny?" he called back.

"We both will," cried Johnny.

"This is shore neighborly," said the sheriff, his china-blue eyes twinkling, when they relieved him of two horses.

"Ain't it?" grinned Johnny. "Who's yore friend?"

"Murderer named Hen Riley. Killed a barkeep over at Single. He didn't really mean to do it. He was drunk at the time an' nobody liked the barkeep anyway, so I guess Hen 'll get off all right."

"I thought maybe he might be one o' the bandits."

"Not Hen. He's a prospector. Wouldn't hurt a flea—when he's sober."

"The fella that killed Mat Neville's inside." Johnny jerked his head toward the hotel.

"He is!"

"Shore as yo're a foot high. Yuh'll find him in the dinin'-room eatin' beans by the mile."

"Wait here till I come back," ordered the sheriff.

Bill Stahl entered the hotel by way of the kitchen. Within three minutes he returned, rolling a sorrowful cigaret.

"Dunno him a-tall," he informed the two. "An' he don't remind me o' nothin' or nobody I ever seen before."

"That's tough," said Johnny simply. "I guess we'll be weavin' along, Bill."

But, as they wove, they stopped at the Blue Front Store and asked for 40-65 cartridges.

"Don't keep 'em," the proprietor told them. "No call for them half an' half calibers. Forty-five ninety an' 38's is all I got."

"Djever keep 40-65's?" persisted Johnny.

"Not since I been keepin' store here, an' that's more'n three years."

This was final and seemed to dispose of Rocket as an ammunition dump for the bandit with the odd-calibered rifle. Johnny and Laguerre went into the street and picked up their bridles. Before they could mount a hatless man on a pinto dashed 'round the corner of the hotel corral. Somewhere behind the hotel sounded the smacking thud of a six-shooter. The hatless man, looking from side to side, raced his pony down the street. He glimpsed Johnny and Laguerre and cut in toward them instantly. The rider's mouth was open, his eyes were staring, his scanty gray hair flickered in the breeze. He look frightened. He probably was.

Another horseman swung past the corner of the hotel corral. He threw down with a jerk. Johnny and Laguerre, dragging their horses by the bridles, scrambled across the sidewalk. *Bang.* The pony of the pursued fell on its knees. The gray-haired man tumbled over the saddle-horn, rolled to one side, struggled to his feet, and ran toward Johnny and Laguerre, wildly flapping his arms.

"Gents! Gents!" he gasped, his eyes now fairly starting out of his head. "Listen! I can tell——"

Bang. The accurate six-shooter of his pursuer put in its period. The expression of the gray-haired man underwent a change in a breath. From extreme fright it veered to one of intense surprise. The upraised

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leg came down. But there was no strength in the knee-joint, and the man fell forward on the ground in the grotesque attitude of one praying in a mosque. There he remained, quite still, and thin trickles of blood seeped downward from a hole in each temple and soaked into the dust of the street.

Johnny and Laguerre returned across the sidewalk. The man with the six-shooter rode up and dismounted. He was a tall young man with alert, animal eyes, prominent jawbones, and a silver star. Johnny knew him. He was Chance Blaisdell, Sheriff Stahl's other deputy.

From saloons, houses, the store and the hotel, folk came hurriedly and gathered about the deputy sheriff and the poor huddled thing that lay at his feet. Blaisdell nonchalantly threw out the cylinder of his six-shooter, ejected the spent shells and reloaded. Sheriff Stahl, wiping his mustache on his sleeve, pushed through the silent crowd and stood beside the deputy.

"What's the trouble, Chance?" he asked, his eyes on the body of the dead man.

Chance gave a perceptible start. Then he laughed shortly.

"Didn't know you was in town, Bill," he said. Bein's yo're here it'll save me makin' out a report. This feller got away from me, an' I had to down him."

"Who was he?"

"One o' the hold-ups that robbed the Wells-Fargo office at Cutter night before last."

"Huh?" The crowd murmured surprisedly.

"Shore. Didn'tcha know? Yep. The gang—they was three of 'em—blowed in the safe, creased the agent twice in one leg, shot the gun out o' his hand an' got away with twenty-five hundred dollars. Me, I'm sleepin' at the hotel with that brand-blotter I'm takin' down to Farewell for Jake Rule, an' I hopped out immediate. Shore, he's safe. Barkeep's guardin' him with a shotgun. I rustled a posse an' we trailed them bouncin' jiggers toward the Emigrant Hills. Half-way there they separated an' we done the same. Yesterday aft'noon I was scoutin' up the country 'round Crow Creek, an' I jumped this here feller.

"I throwed down on him, an' he tried to get away. I dropped his hoss, an' he caves. I herds him along to Cooley's ranch, got him this pinto an' brought him along. I didn't tie him or nothin'—he acted so like he was sick I felt sorry for him. Would yuh believe it, Bill, he got away from me back there in the woods a piece an' I didn't come up on him till he surged in back o' the corral. I missed him the first shot, but I shore got his hoss the second. That didn't satisfy him. He kept right on tryin' to jump the reservation, an' I had to down him. ——," he added regretfully, "betcha he'd 'a' had a lot o' interestin' stuff to tell at the trial."

"Yuh'd oughta been more careful," chided the sheriff. "Next time you drill a leg or somethin'. It's just as good, an' don't hinder the feller's talkin' a little bit."

"Maybe I was a little excited," admitted the deputy.

"Don't let it happen again, then. Howja know he's one o' the hold-ups? Follow his trail alla time?"

"Naw, I lost his trail a heap. But we don't need tracks for evidence with this jigger. I found some o' the express money on him in a busted-open Wells-Fargo package an' I found one o' Old Man Fane's buckskin bags with some dust left in her, too."

"Where's the package an' the bag?"

The deputy fumbled importantly in a saddle pocket, drew out a torn packet that gave forth a chinking sound, and a limp, buckskin bag that closed with a drawstring and bulged at one end.

The sheriff and as much of the crowd as could find space—Johnny and Laguerre were among the first to find that space—examined the evidence. The torn packet was indubitably a Wells-Fargo express package designed to contain, as indicated by the figures, five hundred dollars in gold. There were in it precisely twenty-five double eagles. The buckskin bag, when the sheriff had slacked off the drawstring, was found to contain between three and four ounces of gold dust. Marked on the side, in crude lettering, were the initials L. F. Old Man Fane's given name had been Lucius.

"Looks like he done it all right," chattily remarked the red-head, craning his long neck over the hats of two other men.

"Looks are shore queer things—sometimes," drawled Johnny Ramsay, in whose mind the germ of an idea had suddenly been born.

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CHAPTER XIV

BECAUSE

"WHEN'S Chance goin' to send my pinto back?" demanded querulous Mr. Cooley, combing his whiskers.

"He didn't say," Johnny told him. "Shore y'ain't missed any cayuses?"

"I should say not. Which if I had yuh could hear me yellin' from here to the Yellowstone. Naw, sir, the whole seventeen was in the corral this mornin'. I counted 'em. Didja see the prisoner?"

"Shore."

"Hard customer, an' kind o' old, Chance said. It's about time them road-agents was beginnin' to be caught. Shore too bad Chance had to down him. I ——"

"Didn't you see him—the prisoner?"

"Me? No. Chance he left him tied an' handcuffed to a tree near the Twin Springs while Chance rid over here for a hoss for him. I told Chance to ride by here on his way to Rocket so's the wife could see a real road-agent—she don't have much fun, Mary don't—but I guess Chance was in a hurry. I ain't seen him since. Say, yo're shore that paint pony was in good health, huh?"

"Yo're shore y'ain't seen any strangers, are yuh?" dodged Johnny.

"No, I ain't. Say, they ain't nothin' happened to that pinto, did they?" Lively suspicion brightened Mr. Cooley's faded blue eyes.

"Well—" hesitated Johnny.

"What happened him, huh?" Genuine alarm on the part of Mr. Cooley.

"Chance sort o' killed yore pinto by mistake," was Johnny's answer.

"—— —— Chance Blaisdell to ——!" whooped Mr. Cooley, hopping with rage. "My pinto! I'll learn the —— —— ——! My pinto! By ——, I'll take it out o' Chance's hide! What 'n —— does he think he is, shootin' other folks' hosses! I'll make the county pay for that hoss! By —— I will!"

Having extracted all possible information from Mr. Cooley they left that bereft gentleman to enjoy his wo in private. But they could hear his heartfelt curses for quite a while.

From Cooley's ranch they rode to Hall's, a small ranch east of the Anvil. But no one at Hall's had seen any strangers. Nor were any of the horses missing.

At the Anvil, as was to be expected, their luck was similar. The foreman told them what he had told Jake Rule's posse. They rode on to the B-bar-B. "Baldy" Barbee, the genial old sinner, received them joyously, pressed upon them food and whisky, but—neither he nor his men had cut the trails of any strangers, and all the B-bar-B horses were accounted for.

From the B-bar-B to Dogville is a scant half-day's ride. So Johnny and Laguerre rode to Dogville. They departed as they came—none the wiser.

"S'pose we might's well hit for the Yellow Medicine," said Johnny.

"Shore," grunted Laguerre. "—— funny ting nobody lose de pony. Dem hol'-up shore mus' have de strong hoss."

"They must have," drawled Johnny. "What's the use o' ridin' this trail, Telescope? If we turn off here an' head straight for Longhorn Mountain an' then swing northeast we'll cross the Bend trail 'way north o' Cutter an' strike the Yellow Medicine south o' Big Teepee. Ought to save us a good thirty mile."

Ridge and wooded valley, mountain and wash and draw, passed beneath their horses' feet and they came at last to a brook a few miles south of Cooley's ranch, where the mountain ash flaunted its bunches of gaudy berries above a riot of box-elder bushes. The tired horses thrust hot noses bit under in the water and the men crooked their knees 'round their saddle-horns and rolled cigarets.

"Somethin's dead 'round here," observed Johnny, flirting a blackened match into the bushes.

A little breeze got up and blew among the box-elders.

"Somethin' shore is dead a whole lot," amplified Johnny, wrinkling an offended nose.

"Over dere beyond dem mountain ash," Laguerre said.

Breathing through their mouths they rode beyond the ash-trees. They saw the cause of the nauseous odor. The cause was a dead gray horse in full bloom. Saddled and bridled it lay there, a loathsome thing in the sunlight. Seven gorged crows sat upon the body and stared torpidly at the intruders. Laguerre waved an arm. Cawing raucous protest, the birds flapped heavily away.

"Legs ain't broken or nothing," observed Johnny, inspecting the horse with a

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professional eye. "Good hoss, too. H-L brand. Ain't been dead more'n a week."

"Hot weadair for tell sartain shore," said Laguerre critically, "but she ees less dan a week I tink, me."

"Maybe she's the hoss o' the old feller Chance downed. Didn't he say he jumped him near Crow Creek an' had to kill his hoss? Shore he did. An' right now from here to the creek ain't more'n a few miles. This here's the hoss all right."

"Odder hoss been here too."

"Yeah?"

"Shore. Two—tree—four hoss was tie here to dem mountain ash."

He pointed toward some trees ten yards off.

"How long ago?" asked Johnny.

"I can not tell dat. You know dat lightnin' we see un dat t'undair we hear 'way 'way yondair een de nort'-eas' las' night? Well, den, dat storm she come ovair dees plass—see w'ere de rain was t'row leetle mud on dead hoss—un she wash 'way heap o' sign. But she leave 'nough to show dere was four hoss tie to dem ash."

Johnny rode forward and leaned over the saddle-horn, his eyes on the ground.

"Not a hoofmark," he mourned, "an' me with a photograph in my mind o' every one o' that blue's shoes."

"De red-head she was not een dat beezness at Cuttair mabbeso," cheered Laguerre, who had dismounted and was examining closely the trees to which the four horses had been tied.

"Maybe not," gloomed Johnny.

"One o' dese pony was tie wit' de rope," said Laguerre, pulling several threads of manila from the bark of one of the trees.

"Black-tail dun?"

"Dunno. Don' see no hair."

"Must be him. But Chance didn't say a word about jumpin' five men. He only said one."

"Dey was not all here den mabbeso. De sign does not say de four odder hoss was here w'en dat gray was keel."

"Come to think of it, if they had been here Chance Blaisdell would 'a' been shot shore. He'd 'a' cashed right there, no two ways about it."

"Chance she say dere was t'ree men een dat Cuttair beezness. Here ees five cayuse—de sign o' four un one dead."

"Maybe this dead one was one o' the four."

"I do not tink she was, me. Look how she was head for dem tree w'ere de four was tie w'en she was keel. Eef she was one o' de four she would head away from de tree."

"Maybe the old feller was ridin' away from here an' seen Chance an' turned back with Chance on his trail."

"Ah," exclaimed Laguerre in triumph. "W'en a man ees chasse he ride lak ——. Look de ground behin' de dead hoss. Sof', you see. Well, den, eef de hoss was gallop hees hoofmark was show, *bien sure.* She was be drive een so deep she was stay dere eef she rain all day steady. Un I know she was not rain more dan one—two hour, un dere ees no mark. Dat show de gray hoss was walk to dees plass. She was stand steel or walk w'en she was keel. Now you tink de ol' man was ride heem, huh?"

"I dunno," Johnny said helplessly. "I dunno what to think. She's one puzzle. That's a —— good saddle an' bridle on that gray hoss," he added with apparent irrelevance.

"I don't want 'em," declared Laguerre.

"Me neither, but it seems kind o' a pity to leave 'em there to be all chewed up. Them crows ain't done the leather a bit o' good already."

So Johnny, holding his breath, cut the cinches and throat-latch and freed the bloated body of saddle and bridle. He tossed the saddle into the convenient fork of a mountain ash.

"You'll nevair see eet again," observed Laguerre, eying his comrade curiously.

"I know, but they's silver cinches on that saddle an bridle, an' real hand-carved leather. Yuh don't see that kind every day. Maybe they'll help to run down the rest o' the road-agents. An' if the saddle is able to do us any good there she is safe in that ash fork where we can find her again."

"S'pose anudder man fin' her."

"Small loss. I know what she looks like. An' anyway I don't guess nobody 'll find her right soon. Yuh'll notice that twenty feet away them other branches an' trees hide her pretty complete."

"But w'at you do wit' de bridle dere on de ground."

"That bridle's goin' to travel with me inside the slicker on the back o' my saddle. That's right, laugh! You think you know it all, dontcha? Well, you'll see where she's just a li'l thing like this bridle that'll maybe trip 'em all up."

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CHAPTER XV

TARGET PRACTISE

RIDING with all care for the strength of their mounts—there might be desperate need of that strength later—they came at last to where the tall cone of Big Teepee Mountain rears its timberless top above the Yellow Medicine. Yet they did not swing north along the river. They had decided to visit the ranch of Bale Harper, and they held on due east toward the Medicine Mountains and Dry Creek. Dave Sinclair, in his mention of the ranch had not definitely located the place. But the range of the Medicines is not more than a hundred miles long, and the flat country between the mountains and the creek, even at the widest of the stream's many loops, is a short five miles across.

In places the creek runs through the tangles of box-elder and sumac at the very base of the long slopes where the bull pine and the spruce grow in a sprawling confusion of clumps and patches. The Indians, those that are allowed off the reservation, shun the Medicine Mountains with a great enthusiasm. For, in their simple aboriginal way, they believe that the eternal sound of the wind as it grievously sighs and soughs through the pines that crowd the narrow cañons is the outward expression of the spirits of their ancestors. In common with more enlightened folk they greatly fear such spirits, especially when the sportive shades gambol and frolic among the tree-tops.

On a cool and blowy morning the two stray men saw the shallow waters of Dry Creek a-shine in the sunlight beyond the fringing cottonwoods. When they and their horses had drunk long and deep they rode northward between the mountains and the river.

Occasionally they saw cattle. The brand was B-H. Several times they saw unbranded three and four year olds following their mothers.

"Looks like friend Bale was kind o' careless," observed Johnny. "That makes the ninth over two year old. Bull too, that one."

"De way de cow she sell now, dat mak hunder tirty—hunder forty dollar run 'roun' loose—not even de earmark."

"It'd be a pickup for some gent. Guess Dave spoke the truth when he said Bale didn't fuss 'round his ranch a whole lot. Still, yuh'd think he'd have a round-up once in a while."

The sun was high on the following day when they heard beyond some cottonwoods standing above a thicket of box-elders, the sudden excited barking of a dog. They skirted the box-elders, rode through cottonwoods, and saw across a flat a log ranch-house and stockaded corral backed by tall pines.

The flat was a long two hundred yards in width. In the middle of it a small yellow dog faced them with set legs and barked out his little soul in shrill fury. On a bench outside the door of the ranch-house a man sat and cleaned a Winchester. At least there was a rifle across his knees and he was industriously swabbing out the breech with a rag. The man eyed them steadily as they advanced and did not cease to swab.

"Shut up, Biscuit!" called the man on the bench.

Instantly the yellow dog ceased to shriek, loped to the bench and sat down at the man's feet. Johnny waved a friendly arm. The man waved back, dropped his rag, clacked-to the lever, and laid the Winchester across his knees. Johnny noted that he did not lower the hammer to safety. He wondered if there was a cartridge in the chamber. There are great possibilities in a man with a cocked rifle in his lap.

And now they were close enough to recognize the sharp-featured face in the dark shadow of the hat. Johnny's eyes widened. The man was Bale Harper's brother, Spill, he of the sandy hair and mean expression.

"Howdy," said Johnny gravely, stopping his horse in front of Harper.

"Howdy," returned the amiable Spill, his little eyes flickering between the faces of Johnny and Laguerre.

It was notable that Spill's nimble eyes never squarely encountered those of another. That roving gaze was as elusive as a handful of smoke. Johnny, slouching sidewise in the saddle, rolled a slow cigaret and silently and vainly strove to engage those quick and dodging eyes.

"Got a match, Harper?" he inquired gently.

"Shore," replied Spill, and took one from his hat-band.

"Good layout yuh got here," observed Johnny when the cigaret was going well.

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"Yeah," was the indifferent reply.

"Bale's ranch, ain't it?" persisted Johnny.

"Mine an' his." Accompaniment of an elaborate yawn.

"We knowed yuh had a ranch over this way. We was hopin' to find it. Kind o' thought we'd spend one civilized night anyway."

"Yeah."

Johnny hurdled this without a stagger and kept right on.

"Seen any Flyin'-M hosses 'round here?"

"No, I ain't!" Sharply.

"No offense," said Johnny mildly. "I was just wonderin'. Yuh see, we're scoutin' after a passel of our hosses. A whole heap of 'em has done strayed lately."

"Yeah." Further bored indifference on the part of Mr. Harper.

"Yeah," echoed Johnny, beginning to find the art of conversation a very boggy ford.

Sounded then the abrupt scuffle of boot soles on the floor of the ranch-house, and a lean and craggy person appeared in the doorway. He wore two black eyes, a scratched and puffy nose and a genial expression. In one hand was a chunk of bacon, in the other a butcher knife. Known among men as Skinny Devinney, he was numbered in the list of acquaintances of both Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Laguerre.

"Howdy gents," cried the ex-station-boss heartily. "'Light an' rest yore hats. Dinner's most ready. All I gotta do is slice off some more hawg. Bacon, can tomatters, coffee an' real shore-'nough sugar. Sounds good, huh?"

"Shore does, but—" Johnny looked pointedly to the half-owner.

"Oh that's all right," grinned Skinny Devinney. "He was just studyin' about askin' yuh. He's slow, Spill is. Takes him a while to cinch the hull on his mind. He don't mean nothin' by it, so don't yuh mind him none. He's a real two-legged man behind his face."

"Oh, I got a heart o' gold all right," said Spill Harper, with a snarl of a laugh. "Me'n' that idgit there been a-fightin' all mornin', an' I ain't got over it yet. He says the best hosses come from Texas, an' any fool knows Arizona has the call. 'Light, gents, throw yore hosses in the corral an' be mis'rable with the rest of us."

They "'lighted" and ate with Skinny and Spill. After dinner all four sat on the bench outside the door and smoked and discussed the bleak news of the cow country. Among other incidents Johnny mentioned the robbing of the express office at Cutter. At the news the amazement of Mr. Harper and Mr. Devinney was profound and colorful with oaths.

"They're shore bluebirds," nodded Johnny.

"Yuh'd think they'd take a rest once in a while," said Skinny.

"They'll get dumped soon," declared Spill Harper. "They may be hellamile, but they can't keep it up. 'Tain't natural."

The logical Mr. Harper nodded his head sagely and looked about him for indorsement. Mr. Ramsay also looked about him. In an unobtrusive way he had been doing little else since his arrival. His lazy gray eyes rested for an instant on a cottonwood sapling two hundred yards distant, passed on to a few bullet-riddled tin cans in the foreground, then came back to the sapling. The trunk of the cottonwood was chipped and scarred and feathery with freshly splintered wood. Beyond it another sapling had been broken off some four feet from the ground. Stub and top were held together by a single strip of bark. Johnny's eyes as he looked became lazier.

"Been shootin' some," he drawled, nodding toward the two saplings.

"Nothin' much else to do when we ain't ridin'," explained Skinny.

"Well, I don't claim to be great shakes with a rifle," pursued Johnny, "but I got a good mind to try maybe a few shots."

"Help yoreself," invited Spill, his close-set little eyes beginning to gleam. "Maybe now me'n' Skinny an' yore friend'll shoot with yuh."

"Not me," said Laguerre. "I weel not waste de cartridge."

Spill Harper and Skinny Devinney switched contemptuous eyes to the half-breed. They seemed to be on the point of saying something. But they switched their eyes away without saying it. And somehow the contempt in their eyes had disappeared. Laguerre smiled inwardly and rolled another cigaret.

Johnny, who had gone to the corral for the rifle on his saddle, came back with the long arm and sat down on the bench.

"See that cottonwood child there," he observed carelessly, "the one yuh've shot in two an' busted off. They's just a li'l strip o' bark a-holdin' it to the stub. Looks

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to be about as wide as yore thumb. I'm aimin' to cut her in two an' drop the trunk."

"Three shots?" asked Skinny Devinney.

"One," Johnny said gently.

"Betcha ten even yuh can't do it!" exclaimed Spill.

"Go yuh," Johnny took him up, and turned sleepy eyes on Skinny. "Anybody else want any o' this? I got twenty more says I can cut that bark in two."

"Make it fifty," suggested Skinny, imbued with the gambler's spirit, and keen to make an honest dollar.

"I'm yore ladybug," Johnny told him.

"How about raisin' my ante?" Spill asked eagerly. "S'pose we make it same as Skinny's, huh?"

"So's they won't be any hard feelin's s'pose we do. Gents, I will now give yuh an imitation of a young man puttin' one hundred wheels, five twenty-dollar gold babies of Uncle Sammy's money in the hands of a stakeholder, said office bein' ably filled by Mister Laguerre."

"I hope the money ain't imitation," smiled Skinny, as he made his ante, "'cause I've got mine spent already."

"Yuh'll owe that bartender a whole lot in less'n five minutes," Johnny assured him. "Watch my smoke."

"We will," sneered Spill Harper. "Here's mine, Mister Laguerre. Not that she's really necessary, 'cause yuh'll be handin' her back with somethin' added on before a great while."

"Yeah," laughed Johnny. "In some ways you an' Mister Devinney think a lot alike. You just watch my smoke. Watch the professor take the rabbits out o' grandpa's hat. Look closely, Ferdinand, or yuh'll miss something. See, the professor has ab-so-lutely nothin' up his sleeve but his arm. Watch now, you folks in the front row, an' yuh'll learn all about how to make one hundred dollars in three movements an' a hatful o' smoke."

JOHNNY tossed up his Winchester. There was a flash and a bang and a cloud of gray smoke. The strip of bark parted. The heel of the sapling's severed top scraped down the side of the stub.

Johnny ejected the empty shell, clicked in a fresh cartridge, lowered the hammer to safety and looked inquiringly at Skinny and Spill.

"That wasn't a shot," said Skinny with an uncertain laugh; "that was a miracle."

"Was it?" grinned Johnny.

"Yuh couldn't do it again!" Spill declared emphatically.

"No? Well, we'll see about that later. Just now there's a li'l business to talk over. You gents are satisfied I done what I said I would?"

"Oh ——, take the money!" snapped the sulky Harper.

"Yo're welcome to mine, an' that's whatever," Skinny put in tardily. "Miracle or no miracle, that was shorely one in the black."

"It don't hardly seem right to take this without givin' you gents a chance to come again," Johnny averred, pocketing his clinking handful o' gold. "S'pose now you fellers try a shot or two."

"I can't shoot with you," Skinny said, strangely modest, "but Spill here's most as good as his brother, an' Bale he's a medicine man with a rifle."

"Aw, I ain't nothin' like Bale," grunted Spill, "but I'll get my rifle 'f yuh want. Get yores, Skinny. Maybe Mister Laguerre'd like to make it four-handed."

"Meestair Laguerre ees plenty satisfy for watch de sharpshootair." Thus Laguerre. "But," he added with a sinister smile, "jus' for show you, I weel was'e de cartridge."

The half-breed pulled his gun without haste and rolled the cylinder. It was his habit, as it is the habit of any thoughtful man, to carry the hammer on an empty chamber. He drew a cartridge from his belt and filled that empty chamber. He cocked the six-shooter and shifted sidewise on the bench.

"See dat stone," he remarked softly, nodding toward a large white pebble twenty yards off.

The gun, apparently held with great carelessness in the half-breed's lap, cracked sharply. The white pebble jerked upward and danced along the ground. *Crack!* again that spasmodic leap and skipping roll. Four times more the half-breed fired and every time the white pebble jumped and hopped under the sting of those accurate bullets.

Laguerre calmly turned his cylinder, prodded out the empties, and reloaded.

"I learn dat treeck w'en I was seeck un have plenty tam," he explained. "You do eet, mabbeso?"

The smile with which he accompanied

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these words was not sinister. It was chilling.

"I guess likely," said Skinny, his eyes wide with wonder at what he had just seen. "I guess I will—not. Whatcha tryin' to do, make us jealous? By Gawd, if I ever get mad at you I ain't a-goin' to tell you about it while you'n me is inhabitin' the same county. I guess maybe now I'd better write you a letter an' play safe complete. Spill, I'm tellin' yuh, I used to think I knowed somethin' about guns an' rifles an' such, but I'm free to admit that the last five minutes has been a liberal education with trimmin's. C'mon, Spill, an' le's take our licker like li'l men. We'll die game anyhow."

Johnny knew that Spill's rifle was a 45-90. During the meal he had noticed two other rifles leaning together in a corner of the room. One was the same size as Skinny's, but the other was smaller. It was either a 38 or 40-65. Johnny yearned to lay hands upon it, but one may not shatter etiquette and arouse suspicion so far as to paw another man's rifle. One must resort to strategy and duplicity.

When Skinny appeared with his rifle it was, as Johnny had expected—bread always falls on the buttered side—the other 45-90. So he shot a dozen rounds with the two men while Laguerre watched sleepily. But the astute Johnny did not outshoot his rivals by more than a narrow margin. It would not do to beat them too handily. He knew that they believed his first shot to be more or less of an accident, and he was content that they should so believe. He endeavored to place another bet with them, but their belief was not quite strong enough for that and they refused.

"Tell yuh what," Johnny said suddenly, "let's try another way. We've done our li'l shootin' at that sardine-can, an' Harper an' me are about tied."

"Yes you are!" cried Skinny Devinney. "I've got to admit I can't shoot for shucks alongside you two, but you've outshot Spill forty ways, Ramsay."

"I ain't so shore," denied Spill uglily.

"Listen here to my idea," Johnny said smoothly. "I've been usin' my own rifle right along. Bein' used to it helps a lot."

"Why shouldn't yuh use yore own rifle?" queried the puzzled Skinny.

"No reason a-tall. But I seen a 38 inside. Lemme use that, an' gimme three sightin' shots—it's only fair I'd oughta know if she throws off—an' I'll go yuh a hundred or two hundred 'f yuh like over six hundred yards at any ol' target."

Spill looked at Skinny and winked. As every one knows a weapon with which one is unfamiliar does not make for accuracy.

"I'll go yuh," said Skinny briefly and hurried into the house.

He returned with the smallest of the three rifles and handed it to Johnny.

"She ain't a 38 like you said," he told Johnny. "She's a 40-65."

"Oh yeah, a 40-65."

Johnny took the gun into his hand and weighed it speculatively. He slewed it 'round and worked the lever with his usual uncanny speed. A stream of yellow dragonflies, the cartridges rocketed over his shoulder.

"Want to see how she works," he explained to the watching three, and stooped to retrieve the scattered cartridges.

He was a little slow in filling the magazine. There seemed to be a certain difficulty in pushing the shells through the loading-gate.

"Got any more shells?" he asked, looking at Skinny. "They's only seven here."

"Seven's more'n enough," protested Spill, but the obliging Skinny reentered the house and came out with a fat handful of cartridges and tossed the lot across to Johnny, who had removed himself several yards from the doorsill.

"There's eight more," observed Skinny. "'At's all we got."

"Oh, I guess I ain't goin' to need 'em all," Johnny said and proceeded to make it a full magazine.

He had six cartridges left over, and slipped one into the barrel. The remaining five he dropped into a pocket of his chaps.

"All right," remarked Johnny, sliding his hand into his pocket and briskly clinking the five cartridges. "All right, what are we a-goin' to shoot at?"

"Y'ain't taken yore sightin' shots yet," Spill grunted sourly.

"I'll shore take 'em if yuh say so," smiled Johnny.

At varying ranges he fired three shots at as many cottonwoods. He levered in a fresh cartridge, put the hammer on safety and executed a *pas seul*. His sliding toe struck one of the spent shells and kicked it under the bench. Just then Biscuit, who had absented himself on some business of his own, sidled 'round the corner of the house.

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"Hiyah feller!" called Johnny, stooping and picking up another of the empties at his feet. "Bone, feller, bone!"

He flipped the spent shell whirling toward the yellow dog. But his aim was poor and the brass cylinder struck six feet ahead of the dog and rolled under the bulge of the foundation log of the ranch-house. Biscuit sniffed at the cartridge case, sneezed, then sat down on lean haunches and meditatively scratched himself.

It is not necessary to relate in detail how Johnny in three shots at six hundred yards amazed beyond measure Skinny and Spill and won another hundred dollars. Let it suffice that he did this, and with an air positively apologetic in its mildness returned the 40-65 Winchester to Skinny.

"The magazine's full," said Johnny. "I put in three o' the five shells I had in my pocket. Here's the other two."

CHAPTER XVI

THE AGENCY

TEEPEE MOUNTAIN on Hatchet Creek is almost the twin of Big Teepee on the Yellow Medicine in everything but name. It stands among lesser hills thirty miles north of Paradise Bend. Twenty miles beyond the Teepee, at the junction of the Hatchet and Little Knife creeks, sprawls Johnson's Peak. High, wide and bare, unlovely as rockslides and deep gulches can make it, the base of the great peak covers more ground than several townships. The northern slopes marked the southern boundary of the Fort Yardley Indian Reservation.

The post itself lay along the banks of the Little Knife, and the Indian agent lived trustfully at the agency in the middle of the reservation. And the reservation was—it has been plowed and harrowed by the settler these sixteen years—fifty miles across at the narrowest part. But Indian agents in those days were not supposed to have nerves.

In order to locate a certain Indian, it was necessary, for the redskin is a restless soul, to call upon the agent. Sometimes he knew where to find the desired Indian, more often he did not, but he could at least pass one on to the Indian police who always knew.

So it was that Johnny and Laguerre, their ponies adrip from the ford of the Little Knife, rode into the post of Fort Yardley at guard-mount. The guard was at parade rest as the two punchers trotted up the trail. Which trail crossed the end of the parade. The adjutant gave the command—

"Sounds off!"

The field music, six fifers and four drummers, immediately swung out to pass in front of the officers of the guard to the left of the line. As they swung the fifes and drums shrilled and crashed into "Yankee Doodle."

At the horrific and unexpected racket both cow-ponies went out of their heads. They sprang into the air, came down stiff-legged, and then proceeded, in long bucking leaps to travel across the parade ground. Johnny's horse in its frantic terror charged down upon a major, two captains, and half a dozen lieutenants who were, peaceably watching guard-mount from the boardwalk in front of the C. O.'s. They stood their ground like officers and gentlemen till it was evident that the horse had no intention of stopping. Whereupon they retreated rapidly in several directions.

Johnny, hot and angry, swearing because he had lost his hat, adopted extreme measures just as his mount's forehoofs pounded on the boardwalk. He gave two terrific right and left yanks at the horse's mouth to the inevitable end that the animal crossed its forelegs and stood on its neck. Johnny did not stop going. He landed on his face in Mrs. C. O.'s pet flower-bed. He bounced to his feet, all fresh dirt and crushed pansies, and caught his horse by the bit in time to prevent that agile quadruped, which had regained its feet with remarkable celerity, from trespassing upon the sacred precincts of the C. O.'s porch.

"Hell's bells!" panted Johnny swinging at the head of his capering horse. "Whatsa matter with yuh, yuh goggle-eyed accordeen? This ain't no dance!"

But, as the fifes and drums continued to rattle and squeak on their way back to the right of the line, the horse appeared to think it was a dance, and there was bedlam and hullabaloo on that boardwalk.

Finally the field music ceased playing, to the disgust of every one save the sweating Johnny. When the music stopped the horse did too. Johnny, muttering many words, raised scowling eyes to the row of grinning faces on the C. O.'s porch. His glance, caught by a movement in their rear, swept

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past them to the front door. There stood the tall and dignified C. O. The officer stared balefully at Johnny. But the puncher remained unimpressed. He was not a soldier, so he winked pleasantly at the C. O. and gazed with much interest at the face of the man looking over the C. O.'s shoulder.

The man was the red-head, and he had, as Johnny met his eyes, made a sudden movement as if to dodge out of sight. The puncher wondered why. He also wondered why the red-head should call upon the commanding officer at Fort Yardley. What could a colonel of regulars have in common with such a man? And then Johnny remembered that so far as proof was concerned the yellow-eyed red-head was as pure as any number of square miles of freshly-fallen snow. Johnny nodded to the red-head, hopped into the saddle and rode back across the parade for his hat.

He joined Laguerre who had contrived to stop his horse by the simple expedient of steering the animal into the log wall of the quartermaster's storehouse, and they rode away together.

"That red-headed jigger's here," Johnny told the half-breed. "I seen him at the colonel's house. Inside he was, standin' right behind the colonel all comfortable an' serene. I flapped my ears at him an' he flapped back, but I don't guess he was awful glad to see me. He looked like he wanted to dodge, but wasn't quick enough."

"—— funny ting she ees here, dat red-head," puzzled Laguerre.

"She's worse'n that. We needn't bother about goin' to see the agent now. If he's what we think he is he'll shore trail us an' find out our business. Oh, yeah, lookin' for what became o' Black Bear's dun mare. Good-by Mister Red-head, an' what he knows 'll go to the right place an' you 'n me 'll be all tangled up in our rope. Are you me?"

"I am you all right. But we mus' do somet'ing. We mus' go to de agen' un tell heem de —— lie. We mus' have de raison for come here to de reservation. Den de red-head weel be satisfy we are not trailin' de hold-up. She ees smart, dat m'sieu'."

"So are we smart. An' you leave the lyin' to me. I'll think up a real fancy one. An' another thing, we'd oughta hang 'round an' find out when the red-head goes to the agency an' what happens an' all like that. ——, s'pose he don't go?"

"She weel go, by gar," was the confident assurance of Laguerre. "Eet weel be de job for fin' Black Bear now. We can not ask even de police. Dey might tell. *Sacre nom de Dieu!* —— de luck!"

"Don't yuh know any of these Injuns here, Telescope?"

"De only Enjun w'at belong here I know ees Willie's Ol' Brudder-een-Law, un she ees off de reservation down on de Lazy."

"Lot o' good that'll do us. We just gotta do the best we can then, an' keep Mister High Pockets Red-head breathin' easy about us. Yessir, Telescope, he mustn't get to takin' us serious, not for a minute. I'm tellin' yuh all he needs is one li'l suspicion for him to paint for war prompt an' right away, an' a battle with that gent means him lyin' all so free an' comfortable behind an outcrop or a tree an' you 'n me wanderin' into sight 'round a bend in the trail all ready to be plugged. An' I'm free to admit this here trip o' ours to Fort Yardley is a heap likely to strain his good nature a few an' set his imagination to turnin' flip-flops. An' yuh gotta admit the reservation is a mile or two out o' the way for Flyin'-M stray men."

"I see dat all right, un s'posin' we mak de leetle trap for dat man, Johnny?"

"Not a-tall," Johnny said hastily, instantly divining the fell purpose at the bottom of Laguerre's "leetle trap." "Yuh see, Telescope, this has all gotta be a heap legal. An' she wouldn't be right to go to quarrelin' with the red-head yet. We gotta wait."

"S'pose now she don' wait? S'pose now she go for to bushw'ack us?" Laguerre turned ominous eyes on Johnny.

"Well?"

"I tink eet be —— good t'ing for bushw'ack heem firs', mabbeso."

"Is that yore li'l plan?" Johnny exclaimed, precisely as if he had not from the first correctly fathomed the half-breed's thoughts. "Why, Telescope, I'm shore surprised at yuh. Yuh shore won't get no white card at Sunday School next week."

"Aw ——!" grunted Telescope. "You ees jus' lak Tom Loudon we'n heem un me was trail dat Blakeley gang. By gar, Beel Archer un a frien' hees was foller Tom un me out o' Marysville, un Tom was raise —— w'en I wan' for bushw'ack dem. Well, we do not bushw'ack dem, un dey mak us plenty trouble aftair. More better we

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bushw'ack dem at firs'—ah, we weel not talk about eet. We weel let de red-head go—dees tam. But she have keel' Mat Neville, un nobody was cry eef de red-head she was keel'."

"We gotta be legal about it, I tell yuh."

"You be too —— legal un you die queeck, *bien sure.*"

"This hold-up huntin' shore ain't a safe business, is it, Telescope?" grinned Johnny Ramsay.

To which frivolity Laguerre made reply by repeating that the red-head's calling upon the Fort Yardley C. O. was an odd chance. Johnny made no comment, and conversation languished while the ponies' steady walk-along ate the long miles down.

When now and then they topped the long and sunbaked ridges they looked back over the way they had come. But they saw no moving speck on the back trail betokening a following rider. They did not turn aside to lie in wait and spy patiently. For the man might well be a trailer. In which case it was necessary that their pony tracks lead without deviation to the agency.

Johnny and Laguerre reached the agency in the early afternoon. They had met no Indians on their journey and none was in sight among the gray-brown buildings. The agent, an old-young man, with bored eyes, was sitting on his porch gloomily reading a month-old newspaper. At their coming he folded the paper carefully and stuck it in his hip pocket, for a paper is a precious thing and may, when the printing has been read, be used for cigarets.

Some Indian agents are oppressed with the importance of their stations, but this agent was a human being and lonely. He welcomed the two riders to the shade of his porch and the comfort of his barrel-chairs and proffered refreshment.

"Water pail's right inside the door," said the agent. "Watering trough's 'round the corner o' the house."

SO, BEING horsemen, they first attended to their thirsty mounts, then came back and drank three dipperfuls apiece and joined the agent on the porch.

"Well," said the agent, when the length and dust of the trail had been commented upon, "well, what's the trouble?"

"Trouble?" Johnny raised his eyebrows.

"Of course, trouble." The bored eyes lifted wearily. "What have my Indians been doing?"

Johnny had devised a most excellent lie for the good of the agent, but the latter's remark threw that lie into the discard and substituted another, equally excellent.

"I dunno," said Johnny, "but we've got a sneakin' notion they've maybe been runnin' off our hosses."

"I know," nodded the agent sympathetically. "They will do it. They're like children."

"Yeah, but spankin' won't do 'em no good. We think them hosses are on this reservation now."

"What brand?"

"Flyin'-M. Here's a letter tellin' what we are."

"Why, that's Scotty Mackenzie's outfit, down on the Dogsoldier," said the agent, his eyes skimming the lines of writing.

"Shore, an' she's from Scotty Mackenzie's ranch the hosses have been took."

"How many?"

"We've missed eight," lied Johnny.

"Willie's Old Brother-in-Law and his family are the only ones out on pass." The agent was thinking aloud.

"'Tain't him—not by no manner of means." Johnny was thoroughly determined to absolve once for all that much-respected redskin, Willie's Old Brother-in-Law. "For one thing that Injun is down on the Lazy, an' for another he's a personal friend o' yores truly, an' for another he wouldn't rustle no hosses nohow. No sir, they's been Injuns seen near the ranch, an' right after they was seen the hosses was missed. O' course, I don't say yore Injuns done it, but they's a chance."

"You may be right," sighed the agent. "But my Indians, most of them, range north and west as a rule. However, the only thing to do is look around."

"My idea exactly. We thought we'd come to you first—maybe yuh could help us."

"I can't, except to send a policeman with you. And let me impress upon you if you find these horses there must be no violence. Horses and suspects must be brought by the policeman before me and I will judge the case."

"Fine," said Johnny. "We won't do nothin' illegal. We aim to please. But we shore want them horses."

"Of course. I'll send for a policeman at once."

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This was rushing matters much too speedily to suit Johnny. He had been talking for time, lots of time, the more time the better. And now the agent spoke of a policeman. But Johnny was not at a loss. He made a grimace and rubbed his stomach.

"Guess I musta drank too much o' that water," he muttered.

"What's that?" asked the agent.

"—— bellyache," was the jejune reply.

"Dat watair she was too col' mabbeso," suggested Laguerre, who had caught the significance of a dropped eyelid.

"And you probably didn't stop to make coffee at noon, if you stopped at all," said the agent.

"We didn't," groaned Johnny, entering into the spirit of the moment.

"I thought so. Stomach's had nothing to do all day, and you pour a quart of cold water in it. You sit here. I'll fix you up."

The agent went indoors, and Johnny gave himself up to his acting and pleasant thoughts of a small and invigorating drink of whisky. The private stock of the Indian agent was reputed to be aged, mellow, and potent to a degree. The agent returned with a thick and brimming tumbler. A pleasant glow of anticipation warmed Johnny's whole being. He almost smiled, but remembered himself in time to make a face and hug his stomach.

"Drink this," said the agent kindly.

Johnny held out a trembling hand, took the glass, and gulped down a large and healthy swallow. Then, well-nigh strangling, tears starting from his eyes, he sprang to his feet with a cough and a splutter, and clung to one of the porch uprights. His outraged throat burned. The roof of his mouth and his tongue seemed on fire.

"You only took a little bit," said the agent reprovingly, as he stopped to pick up the fallen glass. "I don't believe it was enough to help your colic."

"Wha—what is that stuff?" gasped Johnny.

"Jamaica ginger," the agent told him. "You seemed in such pain that I made it a little stronger than usual."

"She's great stuff," Johnny said without enthusiasm. "Bet my tongue's raw."

He hung the organ in question out of his mouth and waggled it in the open air. Laguerre choked in an odd way and slid hurriedly 'round the corner of the house. Johnny followed him with angry eyes. He could see nothing to laugh at. He was suffering the preliminary tortures of the damned.

"I'll get you some more," said the agent, who had been watching him closely. "I'll have that colic cured in no time."

"Never mind," was Johnny's hasty injunction. "I feel better already. I—I'll just sit down a li'l while, I guess. That's all I need now. I'll be right in two shakes."

But Johnny spoke to empty air. He heard indoors the clink of bottle neck on tumbler rim.

"Wish I'd chose to fall off the porch an' sprain my ankle instead," he groaned to himself. "That ginger stuff'd shore do a lot more good rubbed on than swallered. Bet he made a mistake an' gimme hoss-liniment anyway," he added morosely.

The agent appeared and pressed on Johnny a fresh tumblerful of colic's first aid. In vain did Johnny affirm upon oath that the pain had almost entirely departed. The agent was an unbelieving citizen.

"Drink it right down," the agent insisted in a tone that was meant to be soothing. "Swallow it quickly. The first glass seemed to bother you a little, so I made this a trifle weaker. Come, come, man, what's the matter with you? This is the best thing in the world for what ails you."

Mentally anathematizing the agent for a liar Johnny drank the awful draft, clamped his jaws, and slumped down on the small of his back in complete bitterness of soul.

"You'll do finely now," the agent assured him, "but if you don't I'll mix you another in jig time."

"Not while I have my health you won't," muttered Johnny.

"What's that?" The agent spoke from the doorway.

"I was just sayin' how the last dose shore stampeded that bellyache," Johnny cried hastily. "Yessir, li'l ol' tummy's shore listenin' to reason now, y'betcha."

Laguerre silently drifted up and sat down on the edge of the porch. He settled an upright comfortably between his shoulder-blades and placidly fished out the makings. Johnny ached to grab Laguerre by his self-satisfied ankles and pull him off the porch. What right had he to sit there and blandly enjoy himself smoking cigarets while his—Johnny's—little insides were causing their possessor acutest agony?

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Johnny wondered dismally whether he himself would ever be able to smoke. It seemed doubtful. The world was a dark place, full of wo and tribulation. A moving speck on the Fort Yardley trail hardly served to rouse Johnny's interest in life and its work.

An hour later the moving speck had resolved itself into a horse and rider. The animal was blue. The horseman wore a high-crowned white hat.

"S'pose we might as well be movin'," the unhappy Johnny grunted to the agent.

"Sure you're able?" With maddening solicitude.

"Shore." Ungraciously.

"I'll get a policeman."

The agent stepped off the porch and crossed to one of the other buildings.

"How you feel?" Laguerre asked gravely.

"Like ——!"

Laguerre looked across the baked and shimmering landscape and winked his off eye at Johnson's Peak.

When the agent returned with an Indian policeman in tow the blue horse and its white-hatted rider were racking in between the agency buildings. The horseman dismounted in front of the agency and trailed his reins. He stuck one foot on the edge of the porch and let his blank yellow stare travel from Laguerre to Johnny.

"Beats —— how I'm always meetin' you gents," he remarked smilelessly.

"Don't it," Johnny said gravely.

"Shore does" nodded the red-head. "Almost seems 's if we'd ought to get acquainted—or somethin'."

Came then that odd and dog-toothed smile that carried no joy whatever and lifted the left side of the man's upper lip. Johnny chuckled as a man chuckles at a most excellent joke.

"Does seem like we'd ought—or somethin'," he drawled.

The red-head watched them silently as they mounted and rode away with the Indian policeman.

CHAPTER XVII

THE INEXPLICABLE RED-HEAD

THE two stray men won the good will of the Indian policeman with tobacco and a very good jack-knife. He was a Piegan, this policeman, and it developed that Laguerre had at one time married a Piegan girl. Which fact made the Indian almost a blood brother.

Nevertheless neither the half-breed nor Johnny were in the least loose in their talk. They spoke casually and with great caution of many things other than Black Bear and his dun mare. But in camp that evening the conversation was turned by Laguerre on horses. Like most Indians, the policeman knew a horse from tail to foretop. It seemed most natural as the discussion progressed for Johnny to assert that there were many horses that could not be broken to stand to the trailing rein, and that a gelding was easier than a mare to break.

The policeman concurred warmly. He had a friend, he said, one Black Bear, who had once owned a dun mare that would not stand without being tied, pulled back on the rope, was incredibly vicious in the biting and kicking line, bucked like a pinwheel twice a week regularly, but that could be ridden down to a whisper without giving out.

"By Gawd," swore the policeman, "dat mare she go forever all same fire hoss on he relroad. She mak you tire 'fore she tire."

"Yeah," Johnny said with interest. "Yore friend got him now?"

"Naw, sol' her." Disgustedly.

"Who to?"

"Dat man wit' de red head un blue hoss was come to de agency 'for we go 'way," was the sufficiently unexpected reply.

"Him," Johnny almost stuttered. Then to cover his surprise, he added, "He ain't ridin' her now."

"Naw. Ride de blue pony now."

"Guess he must be in the hoss business."

"I dunno."

"Don't he come here then, huh?"

"Naw, she no come of'en. Come w'en she buy de mare. Come today. Two tam, mabbeso."

"Funny I can't remember his name. What did he say it was, Telescope?" Johnny turned toward the half-breed.

Laguerre shook his head and looked inquiringly at the policeman.

"Never know hees name. She no tell Black Bear. Black Bear no give a ——. Hees money good, un dat ees all Black Bear wan' for know."

Since the information they had been seeking was now theirs, it was unnecessary to see Black Bear, but it was necessary to

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maintain their bluff of "rustled horses." So they spent the next day riding hither and yon with their friend the Indian policeman. They looked at many horses, but they had covered only a small section of the reservation when, in the afternoon of the third day, they announced their intention of returning to the agency.

"Guess our hosses ain't here, after all," remarked Johnny, with a fine air of regret. "No use a-combin' the whole reservation."

"Dey a 'ole ban' o' pony over dem heel—mabbeso you fin' you hoss," suggested the policeman hopefully, for the horse-band over the hill belonged to a wealthy enemy of his and he—the policeman—was humanly desirous of seeing the mighty brought low.

But the horse-band was allowed to graze in peace and the policeman, mentally lamenting the lack of enterprise displayed by the two stray men, was compelled to ride with them to the agency.

They reached the huddle of low buildings in the last of the twilight, and, by the light of the lantern hanging on a nail beside the agent's door, they saw on the floor of the agent's porch, seven neat McClellan saddles lying all along.

As they dismounted, a soldier strolled 'round the corner of the house and halted at sight of them. The lantern light shone dully yellow on the three faded stripes marking the blue sleeves. The "non-com." faced about and walked quickly in the direction of the corrals. They could hear him calling for Mack, Thomas and Goff. Somewhat more than vaguely uneasy, Johnny stepped up on the porch. The agent came to the open doorway.

"Hello," said the agent cordially. "I was wondering when you'd drift in. Any luck? Too bad. Never mind. Maybe I'll run across 'em. Come in, come in, both of you. Yellow Bird—" to the Indian policeman—"take the horses to the corrals and tell Boom Kettle to feed them."

The agent led the way through the dark front room to a blanketed doorway outlined by narrow lines of light. He pulled aside the heavy blanket, letting out a golden glow of light, and signed for them to enter.

They pushed in, their eyes slitted against the dazzle of the two round-wicked lamps on the table in the middle of the room.

Facing them, his elbows on the table, sat an officer. His shoulder-straps bore the oak-leaves on yellow of a cavalry major, his body was lean, and his face was round, moon-round, and burned red as a brick. The eyes he raised at their entrance were a hard black, and there was nothing moony about them. You often see judge-advocates with just such eyes.The major nodded jerkily, and Johnny and Laguerre nodded back, and wondered what on earth he wanted and why the agent was fidgeting in the background.

"Sit down," said the major. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"Help yoreself," smiled Johnny. "We aim to please."

He hooked a chair forward, slid into it sidewise, and pushed his hat back. He brought out the makings and proceeded to build himself a cigaret. Far be it from him to be either impressed or intimidated by the military. He blew a ring and looked through it at the moon-faced major. Laguerre, slumping comfortably down on his shoulder-blades, smiled an untender smile. He foresaw a jape.

"You two are from Paradise Bend, aren't you?" asked the major.

"Us?" Johnny quirked a surprised eyebrow. "Oh, no, we ain't from the Bend."

"I was told differently." Thus the major severely.

"Yo're apt to hear most anythin' in this country." Johnny's grin did not quite take the curse off the impertinence.

"You'd better tell me what I wish to know," cautioned the major.

"If I only knowed what it was yuh wanted," Johnny suggested gently.

"Who and what are you two men?" The major's tone was that of one addressing a squadron.

"Wrong," declared Johnny. "Wrong twice. We ain't over in the next county, an' we ain't 'what,' not for a minute."

Laguerre began to eye the major with extreme disfavor. The half-breed knew that there was a soldier standing on the porch. He had heard the scrape of a carbine butt and the jingle of spurs.

The major, omitting the "what," repeated his question. Johnny promptly gave the required information.

"How do I know you are telling the truth?" the major inquired with mistaken keenness, and now Johnny perceived what he had not at first, that the hard black eyes of the major were set a little too close together.

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"How do yuh know I'm tellin' the truth?" Johnny cooed softly as a sucking dove. "Y'ain't been west o' the Mississippi long, or yuh'd just naturally know I was tellin' the truth. I dunno but what the colonel would 'a' done better to send along a shavetail—if he's got one with brains."

The barbed rebuke stuck and clung. The major was not exactly a fool. But even as Johnny had divined, he was not long from the East and a New England post where an examining officer might say pretty much what he liked. Some day sense of proportion would be his, but it was decidedly not now. The brick-red of his countenance deepened a shade. The black eyes turned spiteful.

"Now, now, steady," Johnny advised earnestly. "You ain't doin' what the colonel told you to do. 'Find out all yuh can about 'em,' says he, 'an' treat 'em right.' Ain't that correct? Well, don't answer if it hurts yuh. Good old feller, the colonel. I seen him this mornin'. He's got a nice, kind face, but I'm afraid he believes everythin' that's told him."

Johnny shook his head and sighed. It was evident that he was grieving over the trusting nature of the Fort Yardley C. O. Laguerre snickered openly. From the porch came a sound midway between a cough and a snort.

"I believe I'll put you under arrest," said the major.

"No, you won't," Johnny informed him decidedly. "Yore orders don't say nothin' like that."

"How do you know?"

"Easy. You got one buck out there on the porch. I heard him scufflin' 'round. If more o' yore boys had come up on the porch or surrounded the house, then I might 'a' thought somethin'. But nothin' like that. The other five are down at the corrals. One's doin' sentry over yore horses, an' the sergeant, with three to help him, is goin' through the warbags on our saddles."

THE major started up in his chair and rapped out a sharp oath.

"Yuh see," continued Johnny, "they've got a lantern an' I can see 'em right plain through the window behind yuh. An' another thing, if yuh don't want a feller to know how few men yuh got, don't leave yore saddles all out in plain sight on the porch for anybody to count. But don'tcha care," he added kindly. "Everybody makes mistakes—at first."

The major was understood to damn the West and all its Westerners.

"Now, look here," said Johnny, "I know yore feelin's are saddle-galled somethin' terrific, but you rub salve on 'em an' listen to Li'l Willie an' stop cussin' so a gent can get a word in edgeways. S'pose you don't walk in the water so much. S'pose you tell us just what yo're after. We're good fellers, an' helpin' out the Army is right where we live."

"I believe you're a pair of scoundrels," the major said uncertainly.

Laguerre's brows drew together, but Johnny Ramsay merely laughed.

"We're worse than that," he averred, and laughed again. "But we don't go snoopin' through other folks' belongin's."

"It was necessary," the major declared gruffly.

"Yuh mean you thought it was. Loosen up, can't yuh, an' tell us what yo're suspectin' us of? Here, read this. It'll prove what I've been tellin' yuh. Guess I'd ought to showed it to yuh sooner."

He handed Scotty's letter to the major. The latter read it carefully, and handed it back to Johnny.

"Of course, it could be a forgery," grumbled the major.

"O' course she could, an' yuh might be a masquerade yore own self!" barked the indignant Johnny. "How do we know yo're what yuh claim to be? Yuh might be a lightnin'-rod agent, for all we can tell."

"Now, now, no recriminations, please," soothed the agent, stepping forward to the table. "I told you, Major, that these men carried a letter from their employer, and that I knew they were what they claimed to be. I tell you quite frankly that I think you're making a mess of it and that the colonel will not be pleased."

The close-set black eyes of the moon-faced major stared angrily up into the bored ones of the Indian agent.

"This matter requires a certain delicacy of treatment, as it were," the agent went on suavely, "and you, Major, are a trifle too direct. Better let me do it."

"Oh, very well," snarled the major. "Have it your own way."

He rose, kicked back his chair with unnecessary violence, and stalked thumpingly

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from the room. The agent sat down on the edge of the table, stuck his hands into his pockets and smiled at the two ruffled stray men.

"Mustn't mind the major," he remarked. "He means well, and all that sort of thing, but he will try to browbeat people, and that doesn't work—ever. I'm afraid," he added, "that the major has a suspicious nature."

"Oh, no, not a-tall," grinned Johnny, his good humor completely restored.

"There have been quite a few robberies and murders in Sunset and Fort Creek counties lately," observed the agent, suddenly serious. "I understand that all these crimes are supposed to have been committed by the same gang, and that the gang is a large one. Am I right?"

"S'posin' an' knowin' are two different horses."

"You don't know anything definite about the gang, then?"

"Nobody in the Territory—'ceptin' the gang—does, I guess."

"Well, I'd hoped that you might be able to tell me something. You see, within two or three weeks the Army paymaster will arrive at Fort Yardley. The troops will have a three-months pay-day—forty or fifty thousand dollars. And that amount of money is not to be sneezed at by any band of outlaws. The colonel has been warned that the bandits are planning to attack the paymaster and his escort somewhere between Damson—where he will leave the railroad—and the fort. So, knowing that you two came from the vicinity of the Bend, the colonel thought you might be able to give us a little information concerning these robbers."

"Did the colonel expect to find the information in our warbags?" inquired Johnny.

The agent's cheeks reddened.

"That was the major's idea," he averred warmly. "I advised against it. I'm afraid the major came prepared to dislike you."

"He still does," supplemented Johnny. Then he asked curiously, "When was the colonel warned o' this hold-up?"

"Two or three days ago."

"Would yuh mind tellin' who warned him?"

"It was that red-headed man—the one who arrived here as you were leaving with Yellow Bird. Says his name's Camp, Barry Camp."

"The red-head! Him!"

"You seem surprised," said the agent with a sharp look. "Why shouldn't it be he?"

"No reason a-tall," Johnny replied hastily. "Kind o' funny-lookin' jigger, ain't he?"

"Hm-m-m."

The agent pursed his lips and stared steadily at Johnny. After a moment he nodded as if in answer to a self-asked question, and locked long-fingered hands behind his head.

"Tell me what you know about him," he said quietly.

"Nothin'—much," drawled Johnny, and gave the agent a brief account of the killing of Mat Neville.

Of his own surmises concerning the red-head he made no mention.

"Quick on the trigger, eh?" was the agent's comment on the tale. "He looks the part. I don't like him. He has the face of a criminal. He's been on the reservation before—once. Bought a horse, I think. He's greatly interested in you two and your doings."

"Is he?" The eyes of Johnny shifted sidewise and met those of Laguerre.

"You'd think so," the agent said. "After you'd gone away with Yellow Bird, he tried to pump me about you. I'll admit he was clever enough. No open questioning or anything like that. But I knew what he was trying to do. I haven't lived with the wily Indian all these years for nothing. He got small satisfaction, I'm afraid. I don't lead well."

"Maybe it would 'a' been just as well if yuh'd led better—this time," remarked Johnny.

"So that's it," chuckled the agent. "Well, I didn't know, and I don't know anything—much."

"What I meant was that we don't care if the red-head did know we was after some rustled hosses," Johnny explained smoothly. "He ain't our idea o' somethin' to be afraid of."

"Exactly," agreed the agent. "You're a man of discernment. On certain subjects I believe we think alike. I hope we do."

"Why yeah," said Johnny. "I ain't none shore what yo're whirlin' yore loop at, but help yoreself."

"My estimate of your character is more firmly based than ever," chuckled the agent.

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"—— the luck! If it hadn't been for the major I'm sure you'd have talked to some purpose. That's all right. Look as innocent as you please."

"Well, I didn't steal the chicken," grinned Johnny, who was rapidly losing his initial dislike for the agent. "An' I don't like white meat a li'l bit, but would yuh mind tellin' me whether our red-headed friend was the one put the colonel up to investigatin' our records?"

"You wrong the red-head. He cast no suspicion on you. Indeed, so positive was he in his statements that your probity was all that it should be that the colonel began to think you were too good to be true. Hence the major and his rough-hewn tongue."

Johnny shook a helpless head. Laguerre looked up at the ceiling and scratched his left ear.

"I dunno what's the matter with that red-head," Johnny said slowly. "He dunno us 'cept to say 'Howdy,' he ain't got no special call to love us, an' he don't owe us a sou marquee. Whyfor should he spread himself to give us a recommend?"

"You'll have to ask him."

"If he'd only called us hoss-thieves or somethin', I could understand it," pursued Johnny, unheeding. "That would be natural, but this ain't. She's shore a cruel world for the wicked. Gimme the makin's, will yuh, Telescope? I'm plumb afoot for tobacco."

"Well," said the agent, with an air of mock sadness, "the United States Army will have to do the best it can without your help. I certainly wish you luck in your business of locating stray horses."

"Thanks," Johnny said dryly. "Is the red-head 'round the reservation now?"

"He may be, but I imagine he's gone back to the fort. He didn't stay here more than an hour or two."

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO AND TWO

JOHNNY and Laguerre spent the night in their blankets on the hospitable porch of the agent. In the morning they took the trail for Fort Yardley. They started before the moon-faced major and his detail. But half-way to the fort the soldiers, their horses dripping with sweat and white with lather where leather touched hair, overtook and passed them. The officer gazed over the heads of the stray men, but they were not the sort to be ignored against their will.

"Tell the colonel we're comin', Major," shouted Johnny. "Yuh might ask him to have a li'l drink or two on ice while yo're about it."

"You ride so fas' you weel foundair de hoss," bawled Laguerre. "Un den *M'sieu' le Colonel* weel raise —— wit' you."

The two rearmost cavalrymen risked court-martial to turn in their saddles and grin their appreciation. It is not often that the soldier's heart is made merry by civilian chaffing of an unpopular officer. And the major was distinctly not popular in his squadron.

"That colonel may just be —— fool enough to put us in the mill," said Johnny, coughing in the dust of the cavalry's passing, "but we gotta risk goin' through the fort. Anyway, they can't prove nothin'."

"We're all right," averred Laguerre. " 'less dat major she lie."

"I wouldn't put it beyond him. Leastwise I betcha he could stretch the truth an' not strain his conscience a heap, Gawd bless him."

Laguerre nodded absently.

"Eef dat red-head be de bad man why she say we good boy?" he puzzled, after a long minute's silence. "De blame for de hold-up o' de paymaster mus' be on somebody. 'Ere we are? W'y not us?"

"That's just the natural thing for a gent to do," Johnny said promptly. "I've been scratchin' the head about this, an' I figure her this away. Yore ordinary swizzletail who's figurin' on other folks' money does his damnedest to set the blame on some gent. When he's done that, the poor fool thinks he's safe. He don't realize that chuckin' the blame thataway is the first step in cinchin' it on himself. 'Cause, do yuh see, straight gents ain't quick nohow to put the kibosh on anybody. An' they ain't quick to give a jigger they dunno a good recommend, either. See anythin'?"

"I see w'at you mean, but——"

"Did'n' that agent say the red-head went out of his way to say what li'l Sunday-school scholars we was? He ain't no shorthorn, an' he suspects us o' bein' after him, I tell yuh, an' he guesses right to have the soldiers

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corral us or even suspect us, we'd shore suspect him o' bein' somethin' besides a long-legged stepladder with funny eyes an' red hair. There yuh got it in words of one syllable."

"Yes, yes," Laguerre broke in impetuously, "but she have warn' de colonel, dat red-headed man. I dunno w'y she do eet, but I 'ave tink un tink un by gar she ees hones' ting for do."

"Aw! Three hells an' a dam,' Telescope!" exclaimed Johnny in amazement. "Whatcha talkin' about? Are yuh crazy?"

"Naw, I ain' crazy. You are de crazy, mabbeso."

"Say, look here," entreated Johnny, and tapped his saddle-horn with a stiffened forefinger. "Don't yuh know it ain't natural to warn the soldiers o' nothin' in this country? If the Injuns or rustlers run off any o' their hosses, don't we think she's a —— uva joke? S'pose some of 'em come to town an' get shot up, don't we laugh some more? S'pose now their paymaster is robbed? Serve 'em right, says we. Them swaddies never had any sense nohow, an' we'd laugh ourselves sick.

"Do yuh think we'd go outa our way to warn 'em to look out for their *dinero*? Do yuh think so? I guess not, old-timer, I guess not. We wouldn't travel two feet to do it. An' now here this red-headed skinumarink rides from hell to breakfast to tell 'em some naughty men in the dark an' lonesome hills are a-layin' for their darlin' paymaster an' his li'l box o' gold beads. An' you think the red-head's doin' somethin' natural an' honest! Aw ——, Telescope. Aw —— some more!"

"But w'y she do eet, den?" demanded the unconvinced half-breed.

"I dunno why, but I'm aimin' to find out."

"You weel see den, by gar."

"Meanin' that yo're right, huh? I'll just go yuh, Telescope, one hundred to fifty, or higher if yuh like, that warnin' the C. O. is some kind o' trick."

"I weel not bet wit' you," Laguerre declared hastily. "You ees too ——lucky."

Whereupon Johnny overwhelmed him with derision.

When the two rode into Fort Yardley a full troop was standing to horse in front of the stables. They stopped at the post-trader's for tobacco, matches and air-tights. While the trader was handing down the canned tomatoes from an upper shelf the troop, in column of twos, thudded jinglingly past the door.

"Whatsa matter?" asked Johnny. "Why-for the army?"

"Damfino," replied the trader. "Them cavalry's always ridin' 'round some'ers."

"I s'pose they gotta earn their li'l ol' pay somehow," nodded Johnny. "Seen anythin' o' Barry Camp here lately?"

"Barry Camp?"

"Red-headed gent with lots o' legs."

"That long-geared feller? Shore, he was here. Went away this mornin'."

"D'he say where he was headin'." Indifferently.

"Shore did. Seymour City."

"Are yuh shore he said Seymour City?"

"O' course I'm shore. I remember it was Seymour City, 'cause he done said so more'n once while he was talkin'." Thus the trader with some heat.

"No offense, stranger," soothed Johnny. "I was just kind o' surprised Barry didn't leave no word for us. He didn't, did he?" he added hastily.

"Not with me."

"Well, I guess maybe it don't matter. Better gimme six more sacks o' that tobacco, an' another box o' matches."

"Deed you see who was *officier* een dat troop?" inquired Laguerre, when they had remounted, and were riding south in the wake of the cavalry.

"You was nearest the door," said Johnny, shaking his head.

"Dat major wit' de face all same full moon," nodded Laguerre, "un two lieut'nant," he appended, with an eye to accuracy.

Johnny swore sharply.

"Yeah, she ees one —— fool," said the half-breed.

"I didn't mean that so much. But he'll make trouble for us if he can, an' I was kind o' figurin' on taggin' along south to Damson. That red-head, Telescope, is a feller we gotta watch."

"Mabbeso she go to Seymour City. We weel go dere too. I know girl een Seymour City." Laguerre cocked a hopeful eye at Johnny.

"The red-head ain't never goin' to Seymour City," declared Johnny, "or if he does she's only for a blind. He won't do nothin' important there, yuh can gamble on it. Didn't that trader say the red-head

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says twice how he was goin' to Seymour? An' he ain't the kind to tell his business free for nothin' to a gossipin' gent like a post-trader without a reason. An' we can look for that reason a lot nearer than Seymour City."

"You ees worse dan O'l Crook, Johnny," sighed Laguerre. "By gar, w'en I was scout for de Gray Fox I was ride ovair de country lak ——, but I was have res' now un den. I t'ink I was ——fool for follow you, mabbeso. Huh? Naw, I weel not leave you. You would geet los' or somet'ing."

Laguerre laughed slyly, and began to hum an old, old song of faraway Quebec.

AN HOUR out of Fort Yardley the two stray men thought it well to leave the trail. For the red-head was suspicious of them. Both had been witnesses of Mat Neville's death. And there were many places on the trail south where an ill-intentioned man might lie in ambush and calm security and shoot and shoot again.

So they rode the cañons to the east and came out at last into the valley of the Dog-soldier on the range of the Flying-M. Scotty and Doubleday were with the outfit somewhere in Cavalry Valley, the cook told them, when they came to the ranch-house kitchen demanding food.

Being a regular person, the cook asked no questions, but he stood in the doorway and scratched his head and looked after them as they rode away.

"They been out Gawd knows how long," he muttered. "They come in at four in the aft'noon, stuff 'emselves to the back teeth with chuck, catch up fresh hosses an' away they go like they hadn't a minute to live. Them's shore the most energetic stray men I ever seen."

From the Flying-M Johnny and Laguerre rode straight to Paradise Bend, their object to make judicious inquiry concerning the red-head. But that labor was saved them. Passing the hotel they saw the man himself, his heels higher than his head, sitting in a tip-tilted chair on the hotel porch. He nodded gravely to them, and they returned the nod and rode on to the hotel corral, where they unsaddled. Within the stockade the red-head's blue horse was dozing on three legs. There were no sweat-marks on the horse's hide.

"That hoss ain't been rode today," Johnny murmured to Laguerre. "The red-head's waitin' 'round for somethin'."

Dragging their saddles, they entered the hotel by the side door. They left their saddles in the barroom and drifted across the street to Soapy Ragsdale's store. But Soapy was not in, and small Buster knew not his whereabouts.

"Le's go down to the stage station," suggested Johnny.

They went and, outside the stables, they found Racey Dawson polishing two mules with a trace-chain. It appeared that Racey wished to harness the mules to a buckboard. The mules harbored other intentions.

"An' I thought Racey didn't know how to cuss," observed Johnny with placid delight, and squatted down on his heels to enjoy the view. "Ain't them the fightin'-est mules?"

"They are," agreed a gloomy voice above him.

Johnny looked up into the face of a corporal of cavalry.

"An' me," continued the corporal, unhappily watching the mules try to shuck themselves out of their collars, "an' me I gotta drive them bunches o' chain-lightnin' from here to the railroad an' back to Fort Yardley. Gawd!"

The corporal departed muttering. Johnny, a thoughtful crease between his eyes, rose to his feet and with Laguerre went to help Racey. The latter was not grateful. He desired, profanely, to know why they hadn't come sooner. He dwelt monotonously on this point till a mule bit his leg and distracted his attention.

Came then a cavalry lieutenant and the Wells-Fargo agent, Tug Wilson. The latter, fairly drunk, essayed to assist the three in their labors.

"Gotta help get the bu-buckboard ready," he gabbled, clinging to a front wheel and diffusing abroad the rank odor of raw whisky. "Bu-buckboard for pup-pup-paymaster. Rashey, ol' boy, I wuh-wish—say! Whasher —— matter?"

For the lieutenant had slipped a muscular arm under Wilson's elbow and was striving to gently pry the agent from his point of support.

"Let's go into the office," was the officer's earnest suggestion. "Let's go right now."

"I wan' hell-help harnesh mu-mu-mu-hools for pup-pup-pupple-paymaster," Tug

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Wilson declared with owlish intentness. "Pup-paymaster goin' bring money —losh money—thu-thu-thoushands an' thoushands!"

In order to fully impress upon his hearers the magnitude of the amount, Tug Wilson released his grip on the wheel and spread wide his arms. The lieutenant profited by the opportunity to draw away the agent from the buckboard and tow him bargewise in the direction of the office.

"Paymaster, huh!" exclaimed Racey, battering the off mule into his proper place. "Now why 'n —— can't the paymaster use a ambulance, I'd shore like to know?"

Johnny knew the answer to Racey's question. But he said nothing, and, by dint of a quick-working eye and much natural agility, contrived to hook the traces of the off mule without being kicked.

"Gawd help the corp'ral!" grunted Racey Dawson, when the vivacious team was finally hooked in. "Betcha ten they bust the buckboard on him, Johnny."

"Gimme one to ten an' I'll go yuh, hawg," countered Johnny. "Whatcha want, a shore thing?"

"That's the only way I'd ever win any o' yore money, old-timer. Where's that corp'ral? Wow-wow-whoop! Cavalry, here's yore team!"

The corporal came, wiping his mouth, and climbed, swearing under his breath, into the buckboard.

"Turn 'em loose," he grunted, his feet braced, the reins wrapped 'round his wrists.

Johnny and his friends moved quickly, So did the mules. The buckboard, bouncing limberly, careered away into the soft dusk.

"It's a wild life in the Far West," observed Johnny, looking after the retreating vehicle. "The corp'ral, he didn't say nothin' about no paymaster."

"I guess maybe he forgot," Racey hazarded lightly.

"I expect maybe he did," drawled Johnny, and went on to tell Racey a few things.

"Oh, yeah," said Racey, when his brain had grasped the significance of Johnny's words. "Oh, yeah, I did notice how the loot looked worried when Tug began to chatter about the paymaster an' his coin. A full troop's here now. They're camped north o' town a ways. Shore they're the outfit you seen at Fort Yardley. That cussin' corporal told me they'd just come from there. Say, if she wasn't seriouser'n all —— I'd laugh. Think o' that shavetail tellin' Tug what he wanted the buckboard for! Tug!"

Racey snorted in vast contempt. From the rear of the stage station drifted the sound of voices raised in argument.

"Listen to the loot tryin' to sober up Tug," chuckled Johnny.

"It'll take more'n language to do that," said Racey. "C'mon over. Maybe they'll fight or somethin'."

"Nemmine what they do. We want to know what happened since we left."

"Not a —— thing. The Bend's been stiller'n a church on Monday."

"How long's the red-head been here?"

"Got in yesterday. Now, wait, wait, before yuh go bawlin' questions. I ain't quite a fool. I been watchin' him all I could ever since he got in an' he ain't been inside the Broken Dollar."

"That don't prove nothin'. He might 'a'——"

"He might," interrupted Racey, "but he didn't, old-timer. 'Cause yest'day aft'noon Slay went ridin' with Dorothy Burr, an' this mornin' him an' his sister an' Dorothy went ridin' again, so——"

"Again!" Blankly.

"Yeah, again," Racey declared with relish. "What's it to yuh?"

"Me? Nothin'!" Ruffled indignation on the part of Johnny.

"Seems to me I heard—" began the irritating Racey, and paused, his expression demurely innocent.

"It don't matter what yuh heard," Johnny averred hastily. "Them long ears o' yores are liable to hear most anythin'. Y'ought to pin 'em back, Racey ol' boy."

"I expect," grinned Racey. "As I was sayin', Johnny, before yuh began to stutter an' get so red an' funny-lookin', this here Slay and the red-head didn't have no chance to get together. I'd 'a' knowed it, if they had. Maybe they dunno each other."

"Maybe. We'll see. When'd the soldiers sift in?"

" 'Safternoon. Guess they'll be driftin' in the mornin'."

"When they do I'm goin' to trail 'em."

"Whaffor?"

"I want to see what's goin' to happen."

"Nothin'll happen. Them soldiers won't

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let it. Yo're wastin' time. Ain't he, Telescope?"

The half-breed shrugged his shoulders.

"I dunno, me," said he. "One ting good as anudder, I guess."

"That's right, let Johnny think he knows it all!" railed Racey. "He's bad enough now, but first thing yuh know he won't be fit to live with. Tell yuh what, Johnny, s'pose now I go south with yuh 'stead o' Telescope."

"Telescope's gotta watch out for the red-head."

"Fine, then I'll go with yuh."

"No, yuh won't. Somebody's gotta stay here an' look after Harry Slay. Maybe the red-head'll leave, see. Then where'd we be with nobody in the Bend?"

"Then you stay here an' lemme go," urged Racey. "I'm sick o' wrastlin' hosses an' mules."

"Whatsa matter?" Johnny demanded keenly. "Don'tcha enjoy goin' to the Broken Dollar—an' playin' the wheel?"

It was Racey's turn to flush, which he did grandly.

"Luck's only a word to me," he said self-consciously.

"She is to some folks," agreed Johnny. "They's a right pretty lady runnin' the wheel. Didja notice her?"

"I never did like black hair," dodged Racey. "Yaller's my favorite."

"Good strong color," was Johnny's comment as he winked at Laguerre. "Feel like goin' down to the Broken Dollar with us, Racey, for a li'l whirl?"

"I shore don't," was Racey's answer.

"Maybe the Harper boys'll be there, an'——" began Johnny.

"Maybe they won't," interrupted Racey. "Spill ain't been 'round town for quite a while, an' Bale he slides out some'ers yes'-day."

"Yest'day, huh. Before or after the red-head drifted in."

"After."

"Oh, he did, did he? Ain't he the cunnin' li'l rascal? Mis' Burr or the cap'n home yet?"

"The cap'n's still out on his route, but the missus she's home—I heard."

"Ain't yuh seen her?"

"How would I see her?" demanded Racey with what seemed most unnecessary heat. "I don't go romancin' that end o' town."

"Yuh don't," drawled Johnny, his eye-corners puckering. "Well, I wouldn't, either—considerin'."

"Whatcha mean by that?" snarled Racey, with a very red face.

"I was just thinkin' it's a wild night on the canal," twinkled Johnny. "Yessir, them waves must be something tremendous."

"You go to —— an' the Broken Dollar," Racey told him. "Me, I'm gonna look at that red-head person."

Racey, stiff-backed to exaggeration, marched away. Johnny and Laguerre dropped down to the Broken Dollar. As they passed the few playing the wheel—it was before the evening rush of customers—the radiant Mrs. Wallace saw them and nodded brightly. Harry Slay, standing tall and watchful at the end of the long bar, saw them and nodded not so brightly.

THE two stray men drank sparingly of their liquor and watched the occupants of the room with carefully casual eyes. They were hoping that the red-head would appear. But of the many who came in at the open door that evening the red-head was not one. When the hands of the wall clock above the bar came together at midnight, Johnny yawned prodigiously and in a loud voice suggested bed.

Once in the outer dark the two separated, Johnny to go in search of Racey, and Laguerre to watch the Broken Dollar from the the vantage-point of Finnegan's wood-pile across the street. Johnny did not find Racey at the hotel. The bartender did not know where the young man had betaken himself. The red-head was nowhere to be seen, and Johnny inwardly and heartily cursed the recreant Racey. Then he reflected with an incongruous sense of deep injury that it was just like Racey to go off without a word. Might know it! If a man wanted things done right he had to do 'em himself!

The red-head's saddle lay in a corner of the barroom. But Johnny was not satisfied. He borrowed a lantern and looked over the horses in the corral till he found the red-head's blue.

"He must be 'round town some'ers," Johnny told himself, as he put up the bars.

Johnny, wishing he was triplets, went down to the stage station. He shook a hostler awake, vehemently demanding tidings

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of the station-boss. But the hostler was equally vehement in his denial of any knowledge concerning Racey and his movements.

The baffled Johnny was now more than ever out of patience with the world and its works. Hurriedly leaving the vicinity of the station and careless as to the placing of his feet, he walked straight into the business end of a horse that had in some manner escaped from the corral. Johnny did not know that this particular horse happened to be a mule, but he knew that there was no time to dodge.

Those intimately acquainted with the horse and its hybrid know that when there is no time to dodge, one must heartily crowd the hindquarters in question. In this way the kick is transformed into a push. Johnny crowded—hard. The mule delivered its nudge with both heels. The stray man moved sharply to the rear and sat down splashily in the overflow from the station watering-trough. The mule went elsewhere at a gallop.

"——!" said Johnny, for he had meant to rock the mule.

He rose hastily, feeling very wet and itchy, and tenderly fingered his well-barked shins. Hobbling and muttering, he returned to Laguerre. The Broken Dollar was still in full blast.

"Slay's gotta go home some time," Johnny said half an hour later. "Guess I better go an' scout up the house. Maybe the red-head's there waitin' for him. Wish I could find Racey. Hell's bells, she's a wonder I didn't break my leg!"

The unsympathetic half-breed chuckled, and Johnny departed wrathfully. At a little distance he halted and removed his spurs.

The house of the gambler was, of course, dark, but Johnny circled it with no more noise than that made by a light-footed cat and lay down between two little balsams some thirty feet from the edge of the front porch. He would have been pleased to go closer, but, were the red-head within, such a maneuver would be disastrous.

Thus he lay and waited, while the flying squadrons of the night lit and made merry upon exposed portions of his anatomy. In the intervals of killing midges and buzz-bugs he found time to think on a subject that more than hazily filled the far background of his mind.

"It's shore a shame," he reflected, "the way that jigger Slay is makin' himself too popular. This is shore gettin' serious. First thing Dorothy knows she'll wake up 'an find herself married to this feller."

Johnny rolled his eyes at the very idea and slew a buzz-bug that was creeping into his ear.

"If I could only show how Slay's a road-agent quick an' sudden'," he went on glumly, "it'd shore be a heap providential, an' it'd save me trouble—a whole lot o' trouble. I wouldn't have to go fussin' 'round cuttin' Slay out with the lady. As if I wanted to marry Dorothy! Scotty's a —— fool, the ol' bushwhacker. Why, if I did I bet she'd make me save money! Yes-sir, I'll bet—she—she was plenty pretty when she was makin' them pies. An' she can shore cook. ——, what I wanna get married for! Time enough when I get to be an old man."

He conjured before his mind's eye a vision of the lady he would like to marry when an old man. Strangely enough the vision bore a most remarkable resemblance to the young and winsome Dorothy Burr.

"Well, if she ain't married by then, maybe I will marry her," he told himself generously.

In some ways, Johnny Ramsay was tediously young.

The slithering sound of a pebble kicked into action by an advancing foot flattened Johnny to the ground. A bobbing spark appeared above the path leading to the house.

The spark glowed as the smoker inhaled deeply and revealed the white and thin-lipped mouth and long pointed nose of the gambler Slay. Johnny heard the thin rustle of taffeta and then—

"Don't walk so fast, Harry," begged a soft, sweet voice.

"You will wear high heels," replied Harry, slackening not his pace.

"You want me to." Reproachfully.

"Well, I——"

"Let's not quarrel tonight, please," urged the sweet voice. "I'm so tired."

"You're always tired lately," said Slay irritably. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"I think it's my nerves."

"Nerves! You're a fine one to have nerves. What are you going to do—give way?"

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"I only know I'm awfully tired." The sentence trailed off in a weary little sigh.

"You can rest on the porch," grunted Slay. "Here we are."

TWO figures were silhouetted a moment against the stars and Johnny perceived that the smaller was a good ten feet behind the larger.

"Guess she's his sister all right enough," thought the cynical Johnny.

The figures vanished in the utter darkness of the porch. Chair-legs scraped along the boards. A V-shaped splotch of white showed against the blackness.

"I would take off my shawl if I were you!" observed Slay sarcastically. "You wore it wrapped 'round you all the way up, and now——"

Obediently the V-shaped splotch disappeared.

"What do you want to do — catch cold?" went on the petulant Slay.

"How solicitous we have become!" A rising note of hysteria was in the tone of her voice.

"You're needed in the business," came the direct statement pat as a slap in the face.

"Some day I shall certainly leave you." The lady's voice was no longer hysterical. It was icy with anger.

"No, I don't think you will."

"Oh, won't I?"

"No, sis, I don't believe you could ever bring yourself to leave darling brother."

"You flatter yourself."

"Do I?"

There was no answer, and then Slay laughed a low, uncheerful laugh.

"We've got to stick together, and you know it," he said earnestly. "We may have our little spats now and then, but they don't mean anything. We both have tempers—and must make allowances accordingly."

"Oh certainly, by all means we must make allowances! You mean that you may be as hateful as you please and I must make the allowances."

"Try and preserve your sense of proportion, can't you?"

Mrs. Wallace laughed aloud. Oddly enough, it was a laugh of genuine amusement.

"You're more insufferable than a husband," she exclaimed.

"Oh, you know."

"I do. I've only had one husband, but I've known a few men, and of all the masses of conceit I ever ran across, you are the most massive. You think I'm tied to you, do you? By what, if you please? Common interests? Have we any? If so, what are they? Sisterly affection? My dear man, that vanished long ago. Remains then—what?

"I tell you quite frankly that I don't know what keeps me in the neighborhood. I've put up with your nagging and utter selfishness for a great deal longer than has been good for me, and some day, Mister Man, you will receive a vivid surprise—That's right, swear, do! Be just as disagreeable as you can! But remember, I've warned you."

Johnny heard Mrs. Wallace rise, heard the brisk click of her high heels as she walked across the porch into the house, heard the vicious slam of the front door, and swore inwardly.

"That's always the way," he mourned. "Just when she's ready to blat out somethin' worth while she gets mad an' hops in the house. An' all I wanted was a li'l word. Now, I'll bet the red-head won't even come."

Johnny disconsolately watched the firefly spark and glow of Slay's cigar end. The midges and buzz-bugs reveled undisturbed. Johnny did not dare make any noise. He did not know how acute might be the gambler's hearing.

At last Slay threw away his stub and lit another cigar—and still nothing happened. This was not in the least like a detective story Johnny had once read. In the said absorbing tale the hero had eavesdropped with great abandon, obtaining thereby the most important information. In one instance the villain, while the hero lay concealed under a bed, soliloquized at some length to his own ultimate confusion and the profit of the clever sleuth.

"The feller that wrote that book shore didn't know what he was talkin' about," concluded Johnny. "Here's all the chance in the world for Slay to tell the story of his life an' he sits there like a bump on a log. It ain't right."

Silence endured on the porch and among the balsams for the greater part of two hours. The east began to lighten and Johnny began to perspire. For he knew

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that he could not depart unheard, and he was averse to shooting Slay beneath the bedroom window of his sister, as it were. It would be too much like murder. Yet, should Slay continue to sit and the east continue to lighten he would be compelled to do that very thing—or be himself shot. Johnny cautiously dragged out his six-shooter.

Ten minutes later Slay went into the house. The door had barely closed when Johnny was wriggling backward along the ground. Within three minutes he was walking back to the hotel in the cool grayness of the new day.

Johnny had two hours sleep and appeared at breakfast a trifle blear-eyed. He found Laguerre and the red-head eating side by side. Johnny nodded to them, wolfed his meal in silence, and hurried down to the stage station.

"I thought you was goin' to watch the red-head last night," he said to Racey, in the comparative privacy of the open space in front of the corrals.

"I did watch him till him an' Soapy an' Jim Mace an' Carey got to playin' draw over in Soapy's place. Then I drifted after tellin' Soapy to come wake me when they got through. I knowed Soapy could be trusted thataway, an' I was sleepier'n all ——, so I bedded down adjacent under that freight-wagon beyond the waterin'-trough. But Soapy didn't come, an' I slept till mornin' 'cept once when some drunkard come stumblin' 'round an' got all tangled up with Smith's mule Dolly, an' Dolly she kicked the poor fool into the waterin-trough, an' he went off cussin' an' swearin'.

"Serve him right. I felt like kickin' him myself, wakin' me up an' all. Whatsa matter? Whatcha lookin' at me so funny for, huh? Look—Say, they's dried mud on yore chaps! I'll bet you was that drunkard, Johnny! It was you! By Gawd I know it was or yuh wouldn't look at me thataway. Didn'tcha know no better'n to go pullin' Dolly's tail? Gee, that's rich. Here! Whatcha tryin' to do?

Splash!

For Racey, in his carelessness, had been leaning against the upper end of the watering-trough, and Johnny, atingle with the memory of Dolly and the futile hours spent with buzz-bugs, had yielded to the impulse of the moment.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE FLOWER THAT HAS A SPINE

by H. M. BEARDSLEY

DID you ever sit on a cactus
Or feel its spike in your hand?
If you have, you've cussed at the cactus
As the "stickin'est" thing in the land.

But I rather admire the cactus
That bristles, and claws, and bites,
And I've written this verse to the cactus,
The flower that sticks, and fights.

Resilient, resistent, game to the core,
Waging unceasing, defensive war,
Born into battle, contention, and strife,
God! what a fight you put up for your life!

With an inch of sand in which to grow,
You thrust your tentacle roots below.
Stubborn, and sturdy, and supple, and keen,
You raise your battle-flag of green.

The desert hates you for growing there.
The sun assaults you with withering glare.
The rodents gnaw at your anchoring roots.
The rocks would choke your nascent shoots.

The winds bombard you with rocks and sand,
Tear the soil from around you; but still you stand
In stately defiance, in fear of naught,
As gritty a fighter as ever fought.

Tortured and thirsty, sans food and drink,
You live on your nerve, till your innards shrink.
The beasts, and cattle, and crawling things
Would trample and crowd you: but fear your stings.

Weakened and weazened, your life-blood gone,
You stick to your game, and battle on,
And your hollow stalk still rears its head
After your gallant heart is dead.

The next time you step on a cactus
Or feel its spike in your hand,
Just take off your hat to the cactus
As the pluckiest thing in the land.

And resolve that you, like the cactus,
Won't whimper, nor flunk, nor whine.
And stick to the game like the cactus,
The flower that has a spine.

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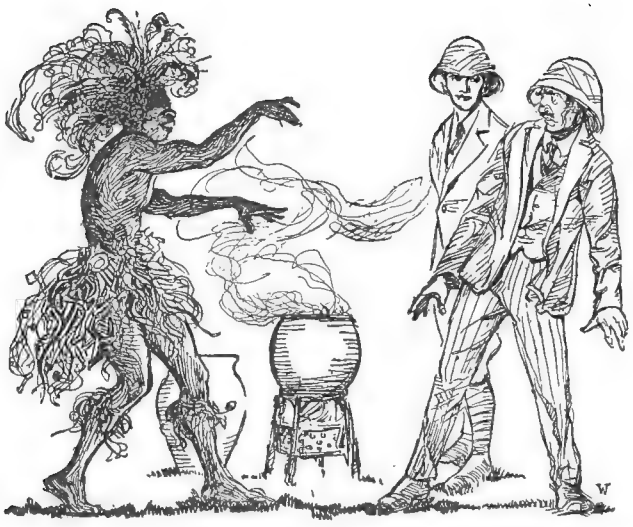

The Show-Down

By Thomas S. Miller

Author of "A Five o'Clock Soldier," "The Veiled Samaritan," etc.

YOUNG Wauchope, the stripling officer of the Royal Sokoto Company, laid his field-glasses along the sheening lagoons of the Upper Niger on a distant white splotch that broke the monotonous reaches of elephant grass, so eagerly intent that he failed to note the lumbering dugout swing out of the stream for a sand island under the powerful guidance of the stern paddler. The white splotch was his kingdom—his command. In his ears and soul rang the words of the "Big Massa"—the agent-general—as he had been hearing them throughout the three weeks of the slow-crawling canoe journey.

"You will proceed to Abukutu and relieve Agent Bayliss," he had said. "I want you to go after the ivory trade up there, and as an incentive I will put you on a ten per cent. bonus on your ivory returns. I am puzzled to understand why Bayliss has shown no ivory in the Abukutu trade returns. Either there's something amiss, or—but there, he writes he has been continually down with fever," Wauchope heard the agent-general saying, and again felt the Big Massa's kindly hand on his shoulder, and again thrilled to the trust implied in his final words.

"I am placing a great deal of confidence in you, Wauchope. You'll be the youngest agent on the river and if you fall down on me I'll never hear the end of it from the London directors."

Fall down on his assignment! Not if youth and strength and a grip on oneself would carry him through. That splotch of whitewashed corrugated iron was not a sequestered trading-station where loneliness and mosquitoes and fever reigned, but was his kingdom, his trust, his command—Abukutu, where his word would be law, and barter palavers throbbed the compound, and there was a ten per cent. bonus, and barbarian chiefs to be held in leash. Why, right then and there the glasses showed a long column leaving the trading-station—fifty headloads—fifty headloads of barter in one day's trade!

Suddenly he was thrown off his feet by the grounding of the canoe. The blacks had shipped their paddles and were stolidly preparing the supper pots, for immemorial custom declared a working day from sunup to sundown, and how were their thick heads to guess at the on-driving urgency of the young massa.

"On! Go on!" he cried. "We must make Abukutu tonight."

But he met sullen faces and mumbles.

"I will *dash* (make present of) cola-nut if we make the station tonight," he promised, and under the lure of the stimulant so craved by the West African, the blacks took up their paddles, and again the throb of the tom-tom, of the guttural chant that had stirred nature's solitudes for the past three weeks, pulsed over the river.

But the bullfrogs were croaking and the

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stars were on the job long before the canoe negotiated the tortuous twistings in and out the shallows and shoals of the dry season. The shrill chorus and hand-clapping rhythm of the mammy dance was in full swing when it slushed the Abukutu clay and Wauchope stretched his long legs for the agent's quarters over the big barter store, surprised that Bayliss was not at the beach to meet his relief. But then he compassionately thought that Bayliss was perhaps too sick to regard the customary formalities, though at the foot of an outside gangway that led up to the agent's quarters he came on a litter and four Yam Yam bearers, which looked as if Bayliss was not too sick to arrange for immediate taking of the trail.

"Ho, Bayliss!" he cheerily called on arriving at the top of the gangway. "Ho, Bayliss!"

Hiccuping answered him from a room to the side of an open room that served for chop-room and office. Then feet shuffled along the balcony, and there appeared a stocky, commonplace man of about forty—a comfortable-looking, easy-going person very different from the hectic, emaciated man Wauchope had had in mind. Bayliss offered a moist, limp hand.

"I'm a bit weak on my pins," he said, or whined, with whisky breath, the whilst running his eyes discriminatingly over Wauchope, who felt he was being sized up and silently objected.

Also he thought that Bayliss made altogether too much parade of his sickness.

"Abukutu has got on my nerves," the latter continued. "I'm crazy to get away. I have everything shipshape for the signing over."

He indicated ledgers and balance-sheets spread out on the table in the chop-room.

"So I observe," Wauchope dryly commented.

"I'm crazy to get away," Bayliss repeated. "If you should insist on taking stock, I give you fair warning you'll have a corpse on your hands."

Wauchope shot him a glance. Bayliss was presuming altogether too much. But he sat down on his feelings.

"You might have waited for the suggestion to come from me, since I shoulder all the responsibility in signing blind," he commented, irritated at the cut-and-driedness of it all.

But he could not really make objections—couldn't drag a sick man through the vast stocks accumulated throughout a long dry season and waiting the rains and deep water that would bring up the freighting stern-wheelers.

Bayliss ignored the criticism.

"That's awfully decent of you, old chap. Some fellers'd been cheap about it."

"It doesn't strike me as so particularly cheap to want to see what you're signing for," Wauchope sharply retorted, glancing down the stock-sheets. "Anyway, the word of a fellow officer goes with me."

Intent on the stock-sheets he failed to note a gleam of satisfaction that lighted up Bayliss' murky eyes.

"One can't crowd a sick man," he added.

"You're a good sport, kid."

"My name's Wauchope, Mister Bayliss," Wauchope sharply corrected, and irritably flung away from the personal element by commenting on the absence of ivory from the stock-sheets.

"Ivory!" scoffed Bayliss. "All the ivory you'll find around Abukutu wouldn't make a church-plate contribution."

"The A. G. had very different notions."

"Notions ain't facts," sneered Bayliss, taking up a pen and dashing his signature to the balance-sheets.

He handed the pen to Wauchope. With a feeling that he was being rushed, yet not wanting to reflect on the other's honesty by any objection, he scrawled his signature to Bayliss' copy, which the latter crammed into a breast pocket, sighing:

"I feel like a long-termer the day the penitentiary gates open. I'm shot all to pieces. I had my glass on your canoe all the afternoon and it seemed at times you weren't moving.

"I was scared you wouldn't make the station tonight, which meant another whole day for me here, as in my condition I couldn't stand the sun, but must travel by the stars."

"Why not go down by the canoe?" puzzled Wauchope. "There's a reed awning 'midships, and you'll be going with the stream, and the blacks make double time when they are getting back to their home village."

"Y-e-s. But I reckoned on cutting across the Lagos trail and catching the Liverpool boat," Bayliss explained as they went down the gangway.

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IT SEEMED to Wauchope that Bayliss climbed into the litter with more agility than consistent with his claim of weakness, and a vague suspicion worried him that Bayliss was covering something up. But he thought that perhaps he was allowing personal antipathy to get the best of him, so choked down the feeling and accompanied the litter as far as the stockade, where he again suffered Bayliss' limp, moist hand, then stood while watching the bearers dim into the starlit blur of the Lagos trail. He recrossed the compound, puzzling over Bayliss' selection of pagan Yam Yams for bearers on a trail that would expose them to Mohammedan fanaticism.

At the foot of the gangway he found the head man of the paddlers waiting him for the promised *dash* of cola-nut. He went up to locate on the stock-sheets the shed that warehoused the nut, called a clerk and gave the issuing order, then took a split-cane seat and gave himself over to romantic dreams of barter and fat bonuses and the agent-general's high commendation. It would be jolly good fun to take the trail once in a while and go out after the mysterious ivory—to palaver *serekais* and headmen and find out where they hid their ivory stocks and then coax them into parting with it for barter.

His dreaming was interrupted by the clerk, who had returned to report.

"Him cola-nut no live, sah. I look'um, an' him no live."

"You've looked and looked for the cola and it doesn't exist," Wauchope translated. "Nonsense. The stock-sheets show seventeen bales. Seventeen bales of cola can't evaporate to nowhere. Mr. Bayliss must have gotten down the wrong shed number."

"No, sah. Cola-nut no live. Massa Bayliss done barter dat cola for ibory."

"For *what?*"

"Ibory, sah."

"But——"

"Massa Bayliss make big ibory barter."

A sudden horrible suspicion swept Wauchope to his feet.

"Then where is the ivory? Take me to the ivory shed one-time (at once)," he demanded.

The black shook his head.

"Him ibory no live."

"But you said that Mister Bayliss buy much ivory."

"Ya-as, sah. But him make long caraban when him see you canoe coming and send it away."

The column he had seen through his field-glasses wind out of the station at sundown!

With a choking sensation at the throat he ordered the clerk to get the keys to the sheds and grabbing the stock-sheets, hurried down into the compound, calling half a dozen clerks from the group of chanting blacks gathered around the lewd "mammy dance." The fellows came sulkily, and proved poor help in the tremendous business of checking up the contents of the huge iron sheds. And he had to be very patient—to keep a strong grip on himself, for they were sizing up the new massa and if he wasn't careful he would earn for all time the sobriquet of "Bawl-in-the-night" massa.

It was terrible work, that took all the romance out of Africa. The heat of the day's sun on sheet iron still stagnated in the sheds, whose air was sickening with the heavy odor of raw rubber. But the horrible worse was the sickening of the soul as the deeper he went into the stock the heavier mounted the deficiency. The looting had been systematic, the barter goods—tobacco-leaf, salt, cottons, beads, etc.—which had gone to the purchase of ivory, not being charged up. Cases had to be opened, the contents tallied, bales were ripped, centers probed. And all the time the youth heard the agent-general saying:

"I'm putting a great deal of confidence in you, Wauchope. If you fall down on me I'll never hear the end of it from the London directors."

It seemed to him now that he had been criminally negligent—lazy. He ought to have taken stock. What excuse could he give for not doing so. Say that Bayliss was sick. Absurd! He ought to have taken stock, had the men mustered, the flag lowered to the departing agent and raised again for himself in due ceremonial order. Why, but for the accident of wanting the cola-nut he might not have discovered the lootings for weeks, so cleverly were they concealed. By then Bayliss would have been safe—where?

The column had gone south along the river bank. That meant the German Kameruns, where the ivory would be

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accepted and no questions asked. Then was Bayliss' start on the Lagos trail a blind? Of course. That explained the pagan Yam Yams for bearers.

He swung into action. Rushing to the agent's quarters he hunted up the log book in which the agents of the trading-stations record local political conditions and keep charts of the trails. A rough idea of retrieving his blunder was forming in his head.

He found an indifferent map of the Kameruns trail, and tracing a forefinger along the serpentining trail, picked out the villages on the route, referring to marginal notes for population and the status and character of the head men, until he came to N'Doro, whose population was scribbled on the margin as eight thousand and whose ruler was set down as *Serekai*—king—N'bumba, a pagan and an avaricious and conceited dandy much given to gross superstition. His fighting men were estimated at fifteen hundred *assegais*, and he claimed the inherited right of taxing caravans and travelers.

Wauchope thought quickly. Though Bayliss might slip by the smaller villages without paying ceremonial visit to the head men, it was certain he could not bluff past N'Doro, for N'bumba would undoubtedly have the trails watched, lest any traveler slip through his country without paying the respects his conceit demanded and the *dash* his avarice expected. Then if a message could be gotten to the *serekai* to hold Bayliss, if not by trick, then by force, until he, Wauchope, came up, he could bring the looter to account. But how to get such a message to N'Doro?

As he sweated over the problem the throb of the tom-tom of the dancers down in the compound gave him an idea. Drum the message—of course!

He gave much thought to the message he should send as he made his way down to the circle of dancers. He must sow distrust of Bayliss in N'bumba's mind, and if possible gain the *serekai* to his own side. How? He thought over the note on the chart anent the *serekai's* character and suddenly solved the question through the chief's vanity and greed. Calling the drummer from the dance he went right to the matter.

"You savvy him *Serekai* N'bumba?"

"I savvy him *Serekai* N'bumba, sah," parrotted the black.

"Good. Then you send him this message. You drum him that bad white man come along with ivory. He come to spy out N'doro country. Tell *serekai* that company's massa come quick with heap big *dash*, if he will delay bad white till he arrives. Savvy?"

"I savvy, sah."

The fellow took his tom-tom to the river bank, for the near presence of water aids the traveling distance of the sound. Very soon Wauchope heard the next village take up the taps and faintly across the night plains he heard the message relayed along to the next village, and so on along the trail to N'Doro. Satisfied, he went to the barter store and selected the "heap big *dash*" from the curious barter junk, to wit: a dragoon's plumed helmet, a tin kerosene lamp and a gilt ring with a chunk of colored glass as big as the Kohinoor diamond.

He then took a bundle of leaf-tobacco and a few gaudy cottons to cover minor expenses, and lastly had the cook make three headloads of "chop," then picked out three Jack Johnsons who bore the Kroo tribal mark and took the trail, without definite plan, other than to come at the man who had played sick and traded on his sympathies to cheat him—to come at the sham-hiccuping, sham-sick looter and snatch away from him the balance-sheet that bore his damning signature.

But though he had no plan, he had a curious self-confidence—a feeling that in an open fight of wits and strength he was more than a match for Bayliss; that now he knew the kind of man he was up against and was on guard he had nothing to fear. His angry eagerness to come at the looter drove a pace at which the Kroos grumbled. But he had lost nearly four hours over the dreadful stock-taking under the necessity of proving his ground before he called the looter to account, and then, too, the ivory column had had several hours start on Bayliss.

Of course the pace of the column was no greater than that of its weakest member and its risks of delay of snake bites and quarrels with the natives of the villages was as many times more than Wauchope's as four could be divided into its numbers. But there was no knowing what Bayliss might not do with N'bumba's avarice and conceit to squirm through the trap the tom-tom message had laid, and he felt

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that if he did not bring the looter to account—if he did not get back his signature he would never be able to look the agent-general in the face again.

ALL that night, with a two-hour rest, he swung along the narrow trail. Then dawn showed small isolated clusters of thatched huts dotting the trail. The natives ran away and hid, excepting where their numbers were sufficient to embolden them to meet the eye of the white man, or the wizard guaranteed his magic against that of the white man's. He swung on under a cruel sun down a plain which the natives had burned over preparatory to yam planting and the rains.

The fine charcoal dust choked his nostrils and lungs and inflamed his eyelids. But his driving rage made little of the discomforts, and whatever he suffered was made worth while when in the afternoon march he sighted a dust-cloud far over the plain. Bayliss' ivory column kicked up that charcoal cloud, which a little toward flaming sundown disappeared. Wauchope interpreted it that the column had entered a village and halted, and by calculation he judged the place to be N'Doro.

He had seven or eight miles to cover to the spot where the cloud had dissipated. A terribly anxious seven miles they were, with his eyes fearing any moment to sight the dust-cloud again, his thousand fears imagining Bayliss seducing the *serekai* into letting him pass on. What means would N'bumba use to delay Bayliss?

He got an answer to this by curious chance after the quick-falling darkness had come. Happening on a party of bush *fulani*—herders—he found them gathered 'round a tom-tom man in great merriment. Fraternizing with them he discovered that the tom-tom man was talking of N'Doro, where a great joke was being played on a white man, whom the *serekai* with polite but firm insistence had invited to be his guest at a banquet. The fellow told the story roguishly in the dialect.

"White man, him come to N'Doro. Him have plenty ivory. *Serekai*, him want to stop white man. But white man say him must go on quick. *Serekai*, him say: 'All travelers through my lands must be my guests. Always it was so. You must feast with me.' White man, him like to say no, but *serekai*, him very very polite. So white man say: 'Alright. But hurry the feast.' *Serekai* say, 'Him feast am cooking. Let us make palaver.'

"They make palaver. Presently white man say 'When is that feast coming along, oh, *Serekai?*' *Serekai* say: 'It am cooking. Let us make more palaver.' They palaver. Presently him white man say again, 'Oh, *Serekai*, when is that feast?' *Serekai* say, 'It am cooking, oh, my honored guest.' Then the people laugh, for a whole sheep and big yams are roasting slow in a pit of hot ashes and the moon will pass over N'Doro before the feast is called."

Wauchope grimly appreciated the "joke" on Bayliss. Dashing the fellows a handful of leaf-tobacco he pushed on to N'Doro, whose thatches soon loomed up, like a cluster of haystacks around a barn, which was the *serekai's* house.

As he swung into the main hut lane his sight was gladdened by a row of forty to eighty-pound tusks, laid along the sands just as they had been dropped from the heads of the bearers as the column had come to a halt. He pushed on over to the larger thatch of the *serekai*, and had to force his way through a crowd of excited natives whom he found were spectators of a feast in the *serekai's* courtyard, the mat walls of which had been put down to let the people in on the spectacle.

The mutton had just been served, whole and in clay-packed fleece. In the smoky light of grass torches Wauchope saw N'bumba seated cross-legged on his mat before Bayliss. He was a repulsive, sawed-off very black black, exceedingly cocky in a blue-and-red striped blazer and a high silk hat, which were evidently gifts from Bayliss, who himself was rigged out to impress the savage mind in a yellow vest with pearl buttons and striped pants.

As Wauchope appeared the *serekai* was in the act of tearing off a juicy shoulder of mutton and for the moment did not observe the new visitor. But Bayliss saw Wauchope immediately, and in spite of the coating of charcoal that covered his face and clothes he recognized the youth and saw that the accounting had come when he was far from supposing that Wauchope was even aware of the thefts. Perhaps he had not given Wauchope credit for such quick action. Anyway for the moment he was

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too flabbergasted to speak. But it could not be long before his natural assurance got going. He felt that he had nothing to fear from the begrimed figure with his meager three Kroo for followers.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't the pink kiddo," he greeted impudently. "You're just in time to get in on the eats. Take my invite, Pinky, and squat. I'm the whole cheese here. Took to me on sight did his nibs; insisted I stay to chop."

Outwardly Wauchope gave no sign; inwardly he raged with that feeling of helplessness in the presence of cool rascality. He felt that nothing he could say would touch Bayliss' conscience, but that he had to fight, to beat Bayliss at his own game. For the first time since Abukutu he felt the need of a plan of action. He saw at once the disadvantage he was placed at in his grime and his meager following against Bayliss' ivory wealth and showy toggery. He saw the *serekai* marveling at the gold Bayliss displayed in his teeth every time he opened his mouth.

Never suspecting that the gold covered decay, the *serekai* thought it must be indeed a very rich and important massa who so adorned his molars. He hardly paid any heed at all to Wauchope's salutation, but with a grunt and a motion with the shoulder of mutton indicated an invitation to the newcomer to be seated and wade in, but stirred up a little interest when Wauchope presented the dragoon's helmet and the ring, with which he at once adorned his villainous person.

"Gotta use your fingers, Pinky," leered Bayliss. "But fancy meeting you here. What are you doing—drumming up trade?"

"In a way," Wauchope drawled, covering his real feelings with airiness. "I'm out to grab a thief and fifty headloads of stolen ivory."

"Is—that—so?" offensively. "How do you figure it to get that ivory. As I see it, it is one pink kiddo and three scared Kroo against me and fifteen hundred *assegais*, for you needn't fool yourself that I'm not the big thing here. Look at the feast—all in the honor of yours truly."

"Maybe," grinned Wauchope. "As a matter of fact though, this feast was prompted by the friendly desire of the *serekai* to accede to a request I had drummed to him to hold on to you till I came along," he replied.

Bayliss started, and his eyes seemed to take a new measure of his antagonist.

"Why, that was real smart of you, Pinky. Shows how one can size a feller up all wrong. Never thought it in you."

"Oh, you haven't my measure, not by a long shot. You managed to put one over on me because I never before met just your brand of skunk and was off guard. Never before met a yellow cur that'd play sick and then bite the hand that tended it. Oh yes, Bayliss, you can count on getting a very different estimate of me before we part again."

"Cackling doesn't always mean eggs. If you're looking for trouble you've come to the right shop. Between you and me and his nibs, speaking real friendly, as it were, the best move you can make, kiddo, is to walk right back to Abukutu. If there's any rough stuff going, Pinky, I'll warn you fair I've a barker at my hip."

"You've come to the feast with a gun!" cried Wauchope, with a note of triumph that drew from Bayliss a question as to whether he had any objections.

"Oh, no," laughed Wauchope, feeling suddenly that the enemy had been given into his hands. "Oh, no; *I* have no objections. I'm highly pleased. As I told you just now, Bayliss, you'll soon have a very different estimate of me. Fact is, you've been so busy acquiring loot that you have neglected to inform yourself on native customs and prejudices.

"A grave mistake, I assure you, Bayliss, and when I say *grave* mistake you may take it literally as a *deathly* mistake. You have come closed fists—that is to say, armed—into your host's house, and though it pains me to put you in so dangerous a position, I feel it is only my duty to inform N'bumba of the breach of etiquette," Wauchope sarcastically enjoined, and turning to the *serekai* made the charge in the dialect.

IT WAS like yelling "fire" in a powder factory. In a second the whole scene had changed. The *serekai* was on his feet, panting, glowering, growling, all the overstock of suspicion which lies skin-deep in a savage bursting out. A hundred *assegais* suddenly flashed among the courtiers; and next moment a full score of their wicked barbed and poisoned heads were making far too close an acquaintance with Bayliss' person than

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was comfortable. Meantime Wauchope quietly relieved him of his revolver.

A great palaver ensued. Bayliss brazenly declared that he had come to the presence armed to protect the *serekai* from the other white, who was the real bad white. Wauchope took up the charge in true palaver style.

"He lies. I am company's massa. If you side with this thief the company will send men and guns and punish you."

"He lies," Bayliss brazenly retorted. "Are the company's massas beardless boys? Do they travel like beggars?"

N'bumba rolled his beady eyes from one to the other and didn't know what to make of it, but felt very important at being in a position to judge between two whites, and anxious as to which side to favor for his own advantage. On the one hand there was the ivory massa with the gold in his teeth and much wealth, but on the other hand if the other really were company's massa he had to be cautious. It was a worrying problem, and in the end he passed the buck to the tribal wizard, who got from under by passing it along to the occult and called for trial by ordeal.

"By God, no!" cried Bayliss in a shocked tone.

Wauchope was about to add his own vociferous objections to a trial so cruel and so revolting to his color pride in its wretched superstition, when he caught sight of Bayliss' terrified face and snatched at a desperate gamble.

"Good, oh, *Serekai*," he cried in the dialect. "Let trial by ordeal decide which of us speaks the truth and which lies."

"You crazy fool," husked Bayliss. "You don't know what you're doing. You're crazy," he repeated, with a certain amount of truth, for the boy was beginning to suffer the affects of the nervous strain he had been under—the shame of his blind signing, his unhappiness at falling down on the agent general and bringing him into trouble with the directors, and then the drop from the exaltation with which he had arrived at Abukutu to that awful stock-taking, and then the hurried marches under the cruel sun, with fear and rage at his heart.

"My God!" shrieked Bayliss, cowering before the youth's set, hard, determined face. "You can't mean it. You're bluffing. God, kiddo, d'ye know what trial by ordeal is?"

"Sure. Seen the ghastly thing a hundred times in the Niger villages," said Wauchope, with outward show of unconcern, though keenly watching the effect on Bayliss, whose yellow chops revealed the terror that clutched his craven soul. "Of course I know trial by ordeal. I'm awf'ly interested in these nigger superstitions, aren't you?" he added, almost smiling, for he saw the fear in Bayliss' face and his confidence took a big boost on it.

In fact, Bayliss had given more attention to the whisky bottle than to native customs, though for that matter he was making up for the neglect right now as he watched the grotesque wizard and his assistants set about the preparations for the trial. His eyes seemed horror-hypnotized as they watched the wizard blow into red heat a brazier of charcoal, over which he then set a pot of water, whilst an assistant placed a pot of oil close by on the sands, each movement being carried out according to an impressive and awe-inspiring ritual as old as freemasonry.

"For God's sake, Wauchope," prayed Bayliss, "let up on this foolery before it is too late. You've got a touch of sun, only you don't know it. Look—listen. I'll go fifty-fifty with you on the ivory. You come along with me to the Kameruns. Your half'll be more than you'd make in three years of fever and mosquitoes at Abukutu. Why should you go back there and sweat to swell the dividends of a bunch of capitalists that never slept out of a feather-bed? For God's sake, Wauchope, wake out of your trance before it's too late."

But the cry only stubborned the youth in a secret hope he nursed that Bayliss would funk and give in at the last moment. He began calmly rolling back his right sleeve.

Bayliss, convinced that he was crazy, saw himself in a terrible dilemma. On the one hand he could not bring himself to giving up the ivory—the fortune that would nest his days forevermore, but on the other hand his eye glued to the steam rising from the pot over the brazier, whilst his ears shrunk from the low, guttural chant of the blacks who crowded 'round. His forehead pearled big drops of sweat.

"For God's sake, Wauchope," he started again, when the youth teasingly interrupted the plaint.

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"Suddenly discovered that Pinky has a real name, eh?"

"Aw, you aren't holding any grudge over that," pleaded the looter. "Listen; I'll do the square thing; we'll take the ivory——"

Wauchope broke in, as if he weren't interested in Bayliss' illegal propositions.

"Just look at those funny wizards. They sure know how to make things scary."

The admonition was superfluous. Bayliss had eyes and ears for nothing else. He watched the head wizard trace a circle around the pots in the sand and then lead his assistants around the circle in a prancing arabesque, to the utterance of weird shrieks and unearthly yells. He began to plead again.

"I've sweated through hell for that ivory," he husked, and then suddenly his entreaty rose to a scream at the youth's adamant face. "I won't go through with it. I'll claim that whites are not subject to *ju-ju*—to this nigger stuff."

But as his eyes swept the brute faces of the blacks and he read in them the lust of cruelty that had brought them there to witness the pain of trial by ordeal he knew the excuse would avail him nothing.

"Were you ever badly scalded, Bayliss?" teased Wauchope, with perhaps overdone indifference, for the thing was getting out of his hands.

The blacks were working themselves into a dangerous excitement and if Bayliss did not soon cave-in it would be too late. Yet he was determined to go through with it—anything rather than confess to the agent-general that he had fallen down on his trust. For one thing he was saved Bayliss' horror of trial by ordeal by his better understanding of it. He knew, as did Bayliss, that the disputants were required to plunge the right hand and forearm into the pot of boiling water and then into the oil, but he knew what Bayliss did not, and that was that the curious test worked out a fair measure of justice.

He had closely observed the workings of the trial in the Niger villages and had concluded that it was largely a case of mind over matter—that an innocent man, believing implicitly in the *ju-juism* of the trial, plunged his arm fearlessly into the boiling water and then quickly into the pore-closing, healing oil and got off with but slight scalding, whereas the guilty man was suffering flesh-creeps before even he took his hesitant, fearful plunge, to the end that he was frightfully scalded.

"I've seen the flesh scalded off niggers' hands," he said, as if he were recounting an idle observation, but studied the effect on Bayliss with desperate hope.

THE looter's teeth were chattering, his hands swung to and fro at his sides as if he had no control over them, his breathing was short and gaspy and the telltale pupils of his eyes widened and contrasted spasmodically. His morale, thanks to the whisky-bottle, was fast going to pieces. He wavered on a hair balance and it wanted very little to topple him. That little the wizard supplied just then.

Advancing toward the whites, making passes in the air and uttering funny noises in his throat, he required from the persons hair or nail parings—something of their bodies—to make *ju-ju* over. He made to pull a hair from Bayliss' head. At his touch the looter scarcely suppressed a shriek. And then suddenly the thing Wauchope had been silently praying for happened.

Bayliss made an unexpected dive through the astonished blacks and fled, down the hut lane and out to the Kamerun trail. Before the blacks could recover from the surprise of it the night had swallowed him up. A moment they hesitated on pursuit, but one laughed, and that gave the key-note. They burst into ribald jeers and laughter.

"*Lo*," they cried. "The white man runs with his conscience."

The sudden translation from the suspense and anxiety to victory for a moment left Wauchope confused. But quickly recovering, he saluted N'bumba and, not giving the chief any time to develop a palaver, bawled the head man of the Yam Yams out of the crowd and gave him marching orders.

In a short while he swung out of the village at the head of the column, each man of which had his headload of ivory, and to throb of tom-tom and chant he marched under the stars. He was exultant, triumphant. Africa was full of romance again. The youngest agent on the Niger had made good.

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THE GAME-WARDEN

BY HENRY OYEN

Author of "Gaston Olaf and Big Business," "The Stolen Cache," etc.

THE frightened old justice of the peace ran his eyes over the rough crowd which filled the tiny court-room, looked sidewise at the implacable game-warden, and, wetting his lips, turned to where the tall young prisoner stood with his pretty, pale-faced wife beside him.

"Tom Burney," he said in quavering tones, "they ain't nothing else for me to do but fine you. The law's almighty clear; a settler may shoot at any time such meat as is required for his family's support, but there's no use talking, you went and overdid it. Warden Simmons caught you with a dozen frozen carcasses cached in the Big Swamp, and you admit you were going to sell 'em to the logging-camps. The law can't make any allowance even though we all know, Tom, you were going to use the money to pay your wife's doctor bill. You broke the law against shooting deer to sell, and this is your second offense. I got to fine you one hundred dollars and warn you that if it happens again you'll get a year in jail."

At the word "jail" the prisoner started up and glared at the game-warden with a fresh degree of ferocity in his fierce young eyes. He was little more than a youth in years as indicated by the freshness of his countenance and the suppleness of his strong, slender body, but in his eyes now there was a hardness which suggested bitter, soul-searing experience. His wife, too pretty and delicate for the wife of a settler, clapped her hand to her lips and sat staring blankly into space.

Warden Simmons—old Tim Simmons—merely tightened his lips a little and gave his prisoner back look for look. He was an old woodsman, with bullet head, short neck and huge shoulders; and he was the most honest and most hated man in Couderay County. It was inevitable that he should be hated: he took his oath of office seriously.

"Boys," he had said when appointed, "we got to quit shooting for the market."

He had arrested friend and foe alike. No plea, bribe or threat could reach him. It had been supposed that he would leave young Tom Burney alone, for Tom had settled only two years before in Thief Creek Valley, the wildest corner of the county, and was having a hard time, but Simmons had caught him, too.

Then the county had definitely labeled the warden as an implacable, fine-hunting bloodhound. The hatred held toward him by his fellow men hurt him. He had not wanted the job, and had taken it only when it was apparent that unless he did there would be no warden.

"Somebody's got to do it," said he; and when he suffered ostracism he accepted it in silence. His job was to protect deer. If the boys couldn't see reason, all right, they'd have to take the consequences. And the consequences had been so frequent and heavy that every time he went into the woods Tim Simmons knew there was high

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probability that he wouldn't come back.

"Jail," said Tom Burney softly, to Simmons. "So that's what you're after, is it? You want to put me in jail."

Warden Simmons shook his head.

"I want you to quit shooting deer for the market, boy. That's all I want."

"You want to put me in jail." Burney repeated the words as if he had not heard Simmons at all. "That's what you're after; you want to put me in jail."

The warden stared. He stared for a long time. He was puzzled at first. But as he studied the young man's face, and that of the girl-wife beside him, he seemed to understand. He looked at the woman when he spoke and somehow he caught her eyes and held them.

"Burney, I'll never put you in jail except for shooting deer illegally."

But Burney was mad with desperation and still he appeared not to hear.

"Keep out of Thief Creek Valley, Simmons," he said. "Keep out or——"

"Tom!" cried his wife.

"*Ssh, ssh, ssh.*" The justice of peace hurried to drown out the young man's words. "You keep a-hold of your tongue, Tom. One hundred dollars."

A settler was already passing the hat among the crowd. When the required amount was paid the men streamed out headed by the justice, who called—

"Come and have a drink, Tom, to show there's no hard feelings."

Burney helped his wife into the cutter and stepped in without a word. Without a word he drove out of town, turning but once to flash a look at Simmons.

"'Y golly," said a woodsman. "I wouldn't care to be old Tim next time he goes up to Thief Creek Valley. No sir, if I was I wouldn't figger on coming back."

II

SIMMONS heard, but he paid no attention. He stood looking after the disappearing cutter. He saw what he was waiting for; the white face of the young wife turning back for a look at him, a look of inexpressible fear in her eyes.

"Poor kid!" mused Simmons. "Poor kid!"

He, too, felt the need of refreshment, so he turned his steps away from the saloon into which the crowd was hurrying, and made his way to the Polack's, the groggery which the "white men" shunned. Simmons did not like the Polack's. He was a white man himself and craved the society of his kind, but on the other hand he had no wish to hurt anybody. He would have had to hurt some one, probably pretty badly, if he had joined the crowd today.

There would have been sneers and words, then blows, and who knows what? At another time the warden might have welcomed such a prospect, but just now the picture of Mrs. Burney's delicate face, the horror that had come in her eyes at the word "jail," were fresh and vivid in his mind, and he wanted no trouble. He wanted to help that girl.

"Hot toddy," said he absently in response to the Polack's greeting, and with the drink in his fist he seated himself in a corner without noticing that a stranger, at the bar, was studying him.

"Poor kid!" he muttered again. "I wonder what that darn young fool Tom has done to make jail such a life-and-death matter with them."

He drank long and deeply of the burning concoction, but the face of the young woman was still before his eyes, and the liquor did not take hold.

"It wasn't just because of that fine," he ruminated. "No, it was something worse than that; something—something that put the fear of God into her."

He sat lost in thought for many minutes. It had hurt him, that look on her face, and he was a lone man and old. When he looked up he saw that the stranger sat on the other side of the table.

"Have a drink, Warden?"

Simmons studied the man without replying. He was obviously a newcomer in the woods, for nothing in that simple environment could produce the puffiness and degradation that showed in the stranger's brutalized countenance.

It takes cities to do that, thought Simmons, like the true woodsman he was; and he studied the man with interest.

The stranger was a big man with bullet head, short neck, large shoulders, in fact, so far as figure went, but figure only, he was remarkably like Simmons. He had large pop-eyes, a forehead that ran back from the brows, a nose like a beak, a vast thin mouth, and a jaw so thick and long that even Tim Simmons, who knew nothing of criminal degeneracy, felt a trifle uneasy.

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A terrible scar, which twisted one eyebrow into a weird shape, did not improve him any.

"I don't think I will," said the warden. "What do you want of me, stranger?"

"Good! I was hep that you were a wise guy the minute I took a slant at you," said the stranger, gesticulating in a manner to show the diamond on his right hand. "I says to myself: 'There's one guy who's got it on the whole bunch of rubes in this town!' I got a proposition, Warden. I can see you're a live wire, so I come to you. It's got to be the right sort of guy to handle it. You're the man. There's five hundred bucks in it for you."

Tim Simmons cleared his throat slowly.

"What sort of a proposition you talking about, stranger?"

The man cast a swift look about to assure himself that no one was within hearing and leaned forward.

"The young mutt you just sloughed a fine on. Know who he is? He's your meal-ticket, five hundred dollars' worth."

Old Tim started a little, and suddenly was attacked by a severe fit of coughing.

"I believe I will have a drink with you, stranger," he stammered. "Excuse me, I got a little cold."

When finally he had recovered himself he sipped, wiped his mustache and said—

"You was saying—about Tom Burney?"

"Tom Burney! So that's what he calls himself, is it? And I suppose he's living straight and got you all bunked into thinking he's square? Burney! His right monicker is Ray Foster, and here's the little plugger that shows you where you get your five hundred."

He passed over a handbill on which was printed a front and a profile cut of Tom Burney, called on the bill Ray Foster, together with the information that the above was wanted for assaulting with deadly weapons one Detective-sergeant Mooney, and that one thousand dollars would be paid for his apprehension.

"Five hundred for you, and five for me, see?" explained the stranger.

"The sheriff is the man you should go to," said Simmons.

The man across the table distorted his countenance into a hideous grimace.

"No sheriffs in mine, boh," said he. "I know what they are. If you're a stranger they vag you and cop the whole bunch of coin themselves. Nix. You know where to pick this guy up. That's why I come to you. All right; you do it." He paused and looked sidewise at Simmons. "Or let me do it," he said significantly. "Understand?" He leaned forward, thrusting out his huge jaws. "Give him to me and you can keep the whole thou'."

Simmons rolled the placard between his fingers for a long time before responding. Then he looked up and smiled a little.

"You did right in coming to me."

"Sure. Sure thing. Don't I know a live one? We can work it——"

"Alone. All alone. Does anybody else know you're up here?"

"Well, I guess not. Think I'm a fish?"

"Not a soul? Sure?"

"Not a soul."

"Good." Simmons was relieved. "Now, how did you happen to locate him?"

"The doll's got a sister she writes to," replied the stranger. "I happened to get hold of one of the letters."

"The doll? Oh, Mrs. Burney?"

"Mrs. Foster, if you gotta have names. He married her all right. She's a peach."

"You know 'em, then?"

"Know 'em? Why, wasn't it in my place that the thing started! Didn't he give me this scar on me lamp and take her away from me? She was singing in cabaret, you know, and Mooney was after her for weeks, but she don't fall for him a little bit. This Foster gink is living at the same house she's rooming at, see, and they're engaged. She quits me, the best drawing-card I had, and goes to work in an office. Yep, and he knocked me cold when I butted in. Then Mooney gets ugly. I gets her address, and Mooney goes up to her house one night with a taxi and a couple gorillas.

"Blooey! He and Foster have it out in her room and Mooney goes to the hospital for six weeks. Foster and the doll make a clean getaway. It's over two years ago, so they must have felt safe, and she began writing to her sister. Fat chance! They don't nobody mark me and get away with it. I'm out to get that guy, and I'll have her back in my cabaret. Best drawing-card I ever had, and she'll have to come when her guy's been got."

Simmons nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, I suppose she will."

He sat staring at the floor lost in thought. At last his mind seemed made up.

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"Now you're dead sure nobody knows you're up here?" he said harshly. "Because if you ain't I won't touch the job. Sure? All right. Come to my shack and keep out of the sheriff's way. He's a greedy cuss and he might smell some easy money, and this is a deal that's got to be kept between you and me."

III

IN THE cold darkness just before daylight next morning Warden Simmons and the stranger drove into a cedar swamp many miles from town, alighted and tied their horses. It had been a stirring night. Whisky had enlivened the long drive, whisky and the tales that the stranger told of doings in his "place" in the city.

"Now you take a young baby doll like this Foster girl, she's a fortune," he confided as he stumbled from the sleigh. "Take her and wise her up, and she's a property. The old guys fall for her kind, the rich, prominent guys who're out for a time. I got a certain big business man lined up. Say, this thousand they're paying for Foster won't be cigaret money compared to what I'll work this millionaire for when I get this chicken trained in the badger game. She's class, she's the kind the rich poppas fall for. And you gotta let me mark Foster, mark him so his face—hey! What the ——'s this?"

Simmons had suddenly thrown off his ulster. In his right hand was a pistol.

"If you're going to mark Foster you're going up there and get him alone," said he. "That's only fair. You're playing with loaded dice, stranger, so I'm going to even it up. Take off your coat."

"What! What you trying to pull on me?"

The stranger's hand went into the pocket of his coat. Simmons' eyes glittered.

"Bring those hands out empty. Now—take off your coat. I ain't pulling anything on you, stranger; just making the game square. Take it off."

The stranger flung his fur coat on the ground. The glitter in old Tim's eyes had made him shiver.

"Now, put this on." Simmons kicked his gray ulster forward. "Now turn around."

He jerked the fur cap from the man's head and thrust thereon his own peaked cloth cap. He gave the stranger back the long-barreled six-shooter from the fur coat.

"And now the game's square," said he. "Now go up and get your man. No, don't turn around."

"You mean I can get him—put him out of business—and you won't squeal?" snarled the dive-keeper.

"I mean the game's even now," said Simmons. "March."

And so up the frozen bed of Thief Creek they marched. Old Tim had timed his progress well. As they emerged from the cedar swamp into the flat of the valley it was broad daylight, and from a cabin hidden by a bend of the creek there arose a thin column of smoke.

At the bend Simmons halted, hiding behind a pine.

"Keep traveling," he said. "He's in there. Now it's up to you."

The light of the killer in sight of his prey supplanted the puzzled expression in the stranger's eyes. He gripped the revolver in his pocket and crept forward. The cabin door opened and slammed suddenly, and Warden Simmons turned and ran. He had not gone far before he heard the roar of the six-shooter. It was many seconds later before a 30-30 snapped its response. There was no third shot.

"It was even," muttered Simmons, as he ran on. "It was even."

A week later Tom Burney, haggard and hollow-eyed, and painfully using a crutch, drove up to the warden's house.

"Why don't you send the sheriff?" he demanded. "Why are you playing with me? I saw your tracks up there. You know. Why don't you come and get me?"

Old Tim looked blankly at Burney.

"Been shooting deer for the market again, Tom?" he asked.

Then he stretched out both hands and laid them on the young man's shoulders.

"Boy, she's safe now, you're both safe. That—that thing I dressed up to look like me and drove out on the runway for you was the only one of that gang that knew you're up here. And I'm the only one he told about—about certain things; and I'm an awful forgetter. But," he concluded, shaking his head seriously, "don't you go shooting no more deer, Tom. Deer, my boy, is God's creatures and pertected by law; but I looked through the hull game-code, and there ain't a single word there about snakes."

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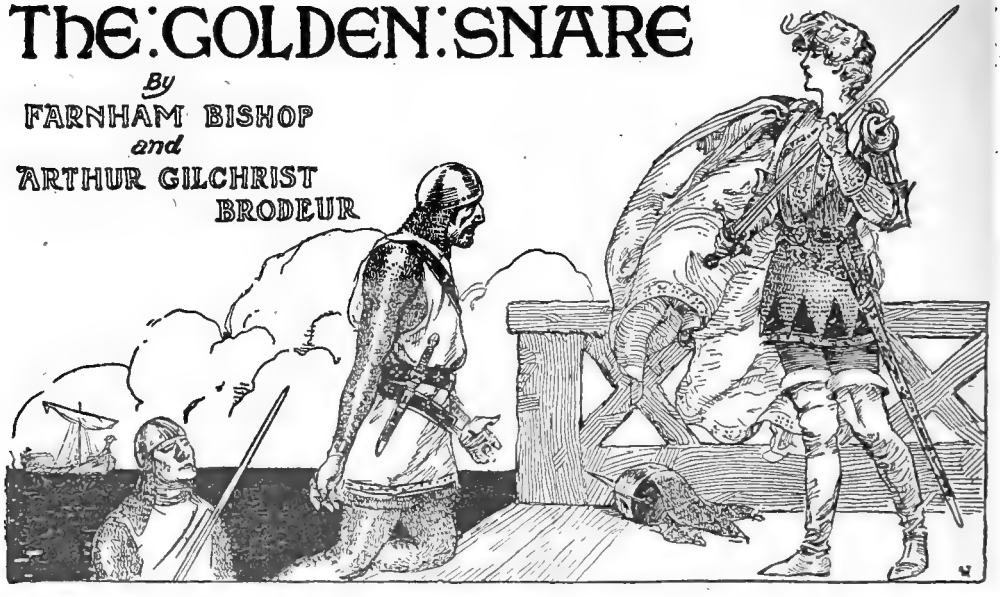
THE GOLDEN SNARE

By
FARNHAM BISHOP
and
ARTHUR GILCHRIST
BRODEUR



Authors of "With Sharp Sword-Edges," "Two Strong Men," etc.

EDITOR'S NOTE—In an interesting letter in "Camp-Fire" at the end of this issue the authors of "The Golden Snare" give a brief but illuminating picture of the age and place in which the action of this stirring tale of some eight centuries ago is laid.

THE galley-slaves, half-asleep over their oars, kept up a languid beat in time to their overseer's drowsy counting. The *Sea Nymph's* nodding captain dreamed of iced wine and lettuce in the cool arcade of some shore tavern; there was no warning cry from the lookout or sleepy helmsman, no attempt to alter the course or sound a call to arms. No one saw the black, looming shadow that crept menacingly near.

Healthily asleep behind a curtain which, drawn across the forward end of the half-open cabin on the poop and laced to the railing, sheltered her from the eyes of her father's seamen, the Lady Fulvia lay without covering or garment on a gilded, deep-cushioned bed. A purple awning kept off the dews of the hot Mediterranean night and screened her eyes from the glare of the masthead-light.

About her, on pallets, lay her maids, less lovely than she in spite of the beauty for which they had been chosen to her service. Like herself, like all the others of her time, they were innocent of night-clothing. All slept with the serenity of sinless pilgrims; for they were returning to Rocca Forte from a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santa Lucia di Celsi.

Like a huge monster striking in the dark, the triple-timbered, steel-shod ram of another galley tore through the *Sea Nymph's* starboard side, throwing her over to port till she lay on her beam-ends, water spouting inboard in fountains through her oar-ports. In a moment she righted, rolled back on an even keel, then heeled to starboard, the great ragged hole in her timbers letting in a rush of hissing, gurgling seawater. Its ram withdrawn, the monster that had crushed her backed away. Swiftly the *Sea Nymph* filled and sank, while her startled, panic-stricken crew and passengers wailed and cried to heaven.

Fulvia woke with the crash of shattered timbers and the shrieks of mangled men ringing in her ears, and a strangling, tingling that choked throat and lungs thickly. She could not see; she could only feel the black smother that pressed against and within her. With the energy of fear, she fought against it, lashing out with arms and legs, blinded and gasping. At last she shook it off, and with a final gulp of salt water, she found herself swimming instinctively and badly in the warm Mediterranean.

Hurled from her bed by the shock of

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the hostile ram, she had been shot out over the low, uncurtained port bulwark into the sea; she had not more than half waked till she went under and sank deep. Now, however, her courage restored with full consciousness, she launched out into a steady stroke through the black darkness. She had come up facing the galley. The masthead-light, still burning, swung nearer and nearer the waves; the screams of the chained rowers beat horribly upon her ears.

Her heart convulsed with pity and horror, she turned and struck out with all her might, knowing that the suction of the sinking ship would drag her under if she waited. In her eighteen short years Fulvia had seen ships sink and men die often. As she fought her way past the growing eddies, a loud and terrible wail rang out behind her, and she knew the *Sea Nymph* was gone. She did not dare look to see.

As she swam, her numb mind wakened to more than normal activity. Thoughts rushed in upon her, questions surged into her brain, requiring immediate answer. Who had made the attack? Who had dared sink a ship of her father's? Not pirates, surely, for Count Arnulfo of Rocca Forte had swept them far from his coast ten years before and held a broad strip of sea with his swift galleys. Where were the patrol-ships of her father's vassals, who were responsible even in ordinary times for the safety of the shores intrusted to them? Why were they not doubly on the watch now, when they knew that she was coming back from her pilgrimage?

Fierce anger swept over her. Arnulfo's only child, she had all the fierce Viking spirit of that iron-handed Norman adventurer, whose ancestors, like others of their race, had overrun all shores from the Baltic to Northern Africa, carving out kingdoms for themselves in the warm, rich South. Arnulfo's grandsire, half-Dane, half-Frenchman, adventuring from Normandy, had seized the land of Rocca Forte, with its motley, many-tongued towns, its abundant fields, its dark, rough mountains and its deep harbor dominated by the grim cliff and ruinous fortress that had given the land its name.

That first Arnulfo, or Arinulf—"The Eagle-Wolf," as his Northern companions called him—had rebuilt the fortress out of hewn stones quarried long ago by Greeks, by the Carthaginian seamen who came after the Greeks, by the Romans who came after both, and by the fierce Saracens that raided the golden island ruled and loved in the dead past by those three vanished peoples. He, the Eagle-Wolf, had founded Rocca Forte's grandeur; his son strengthened that which the Dane had won; and the son's son, Fulvia's father, sent his trained warriors of the many bloods and his Norman captains over the sea, behind the mountains, along the coast, enriching and extending his domains.

Having acted as King Roger's champion when that monarch was crowned at Palermo in 1130, Arnulfo was high in favor with the court. His was a strong, savage house, given to hearty laughter, to fierce tempests of destructive anger, to unexpected anger, to unexpected kindness and unguessed ferocity. And he was just, even when most cruel.

From her father and his sires, Fulvia had inherited their tempestuous anger, their iron strength, their flaming blue eyes. But it was her mother who gave Fulvia her dark velvet skin, her mother's silken Italian grace that swayed Fulvia's strong, lithe body, her mother's patrician charm and soft ways that hid the Northern fire in Fulvia's heart. Roma Marcellini was a daughter of the proudest family in the Eternal City, a family that had given consuls and generals of legions to the Republic of the Seven Hills and the Empire of the Cæsars. Yet Roma had given no son to Arnulfo; only a daughter more beautiful than herself, with all her Roman queenliness.

Born and matured in that Sicily which has been lovely from the dawn of time, growing up one of its children of a hundred races, Fulvia had found herself virtual queen over a motly, picturesque people whose Southern blood was strengthened by the infusion of wild Northern strains: Frank, Dane and Norman. She was the heritor of a land that sparkled and overflowed with beauty beneath a dazzling sky; a land of rock, sea, fiery mountains, and abundant rivers. All about her were the strongholds of her own folk, the temples and cities of dead races that had built grandly and grandly perished. She did not understand all these things, but they were part of her, part of her own strength and beauty, part of her own fire and grace.

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And she, the daughter of Arnulfo of Rocca Forte, had been assailed in the waters which her own father ruled! She had seen her ship sinking and her people perishing, the victims of a hostile attack where no enemy should dare to show a sail! Who had been bold enough to do this thing? And above all, where were the watchful galleys of Fulk di Neri—Fulk the Black—and of Ricoberto, who held this part of the coast for her father?

VOICES boomed across the water. Looking back over her shoulder as she swam, Fulvia saw the mast-head-light of the *Sea Nymph*, still burning, a lance-length above the waves. The galley must have gone down in shallow water, she realized, and now rested on the bottom. Some of her people—her maids, perhaps, who were on the high poop and such others as were not chained to benches like the wretched galley-slaves—might well have escaped the sea.

"Aid! Aid for the Lady Fulvia!" rang a stentorian voice; the voice, she knew, of Jaufré, the faithful captain of the escort. Lights flashed; in their shifting glare she saw that the *Sea Nymph's* waist was barely awash. From the high forecastle came the clash and gleam of weapons.

"Aid! Who attacks Arnulfo's daughter?" Jaufré called again.

"Silence that fool with a knife!" a thick voice boomed in reply. "Cut him down!"

In sheer surprise, Fulvia stopped treading water, and swallowed a salt mouthful. He who had just spoken, who must have been the attacker, was Fulk di Neri himself! Traitors, not pirates, had sunk her ship!

"Let him live!" came across the water in a high-pitched, effeminate drawl. "Having lost two good men overpowering the fellow, it would be wasteful to kill him. Let Jaufré be put to use; the *Falcon* needs a new starboard stroke-oar. Chain him to the bench."

Fulvia grew hot with anger. This man who ordered her servant chained to a bench was Ricoberto, the second of the two vassals who should have guarded the shore and protected her with their lives.

"But I fear the Lady Fulvia is drowned," the languid voice resumed. "We have spent our pains for nothing."

"You thrice-accursed fool!" Fulk roared at him. "She would be safe in our hands now, if you had laid your ship aboard and seized her, as we had planned. Why in the name of Judas did you ram the *Sea Nymph* as if she had been full of Saracens?"

"You may speak to my helmsman about that, if it please you," Ricoberto answered sulkily. "But you will have to go to a dryer and warmer place to find him, for I gave him my point for his awkwardness. Light the rest of your cressets and let us search the wreck, which is not all under water. We may yet find the Lady Fulvia aboard her."

"Pray to your patron saint that you may!" Fulk retorted. "If she has been drowned, here in the waters intrusted to us, Arnulfo will boil us in blood. Her dead body would prove a poor hostage for us. Cressets, there!"

Between wrath and fear, Fulvia swam hastily away from the wreck. In a little, the cressets—iron baskets holding wreaths of tar-soaked rope—would blaze out over the water, and she would be seen. She knew now that the attack had been carefully planned by the very men whose duty it was to defend her, that they had purposed to seize her, either to facilitate the schemes of their own treacherous ambition, or for a worse purpose. In either case, they had touched the weak spot in Arnulfo's armor.

If they meditated revolt, planned to depose the old warrior-count and seize his possessions, they had only to capture her, and her father's hands would be tied. Dearly as he loved his power and his rich lands, he loved Fulvia more. With her in their hands, the traitors could play for what stakes they chose, set any terms they would.

Striking out swiftly and silently, she bore away from the wreck and the two galleys lying beside it. A glance at the waning stars gave her direction—land was straight before her—and told her that dawn was near. She must reach the shore and find hiding before the light betrayed her to the searchers' eyes.

She knew both men well. Indeed, both had sued for her hand. Fulk, a swarthy Norman giant of forty-odd years, was a famous fighter and a swaggering bully. He commanded five galleys and rendered homage to Arnulfo for a rocky strip of coast and a brace of fishing villages. His

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men were professional soldiers of all races. Like the soldier he was, he had gone direct to her father, asking to marry Fulvia. Arnulfo had laughed in his face, bade him wed with his equals, and given him another village. Preferring Arnulfo's laughter to his wrath, Fulk accepted the gift, with a poor pretense at content.

Ricoberto, a smooth, womanish Italian, was made in another mold. Proud of his girlish features, he wore his dark hair in long curls over his shoulders, delighted in rich garments and splendid Saracen armor, and perfumed himself noxiously. A splendid swordsman, a dancer and harper of great skill, he could be a charming companion, and talked well. But he was cruel: a serving-maid had once spilled a basin of water over his soft boots; Ricoberto had slapped the girl's face again and again with his open palm, till Fulvia's angry protest stopped him.

Ricoberto had brought his suit to Fulvia himself. Quite sure of himself he had been, maddeningly self-possessed. When she refused him, he smiled lightly, and replied, with all gaiety:

"There is time yet, lady; and there are other women. You will grow wiser as you grow older."

Arnulfo was getting gray; his arm was not as strong as it had been. It might be, Fulvia reflected, that these traitors planned to use her against the old count's power, to compel him to resign his lands to them. Or it might be that they meant to compel her to choose between them. Rather choose death, she resolved, and swam faster. The gray of dawn was already encroaching on and mingling with the black of night.

"They slew my people!" she muttered fiercely. "Their evil love, or their cursed ambition, sent good men to death! I will pay them for it if it costs me my life!"

Before her the shore was outlined against the growing light, as a low, black line. A few minutes more and she would be safely on the beach. Safely? What safety was there on land or water for a lovely, helpless, unclothed girl? Yet better far, she thought, to risk whatever might be in store for her ashore than to fall into the hands of men whose wicked purpose was proved by murder and treason. Besides, once ashore, she might lie hidden in some wood until chance sent a peasant woman to her rescue, or found her some escape, however hard, from the fate that capture meant.

Gradually the shore became clearer; it was near at hand now, and the light was bright enough to enable Fulvia to make out the country a little way behind it. It was low, with a long, sandy beach inclosed within the protecting arms of two headlands and split by the slow current of a brook. As the first red glory of sunrise broke upon the blue water, she could see that the brook was wide and clear. It came down to the beach through a high wilderness of salt grass, beyond which the ground rose slowly, the hills beyond inclosing its valley between their green sides.

Behind the salt grass, the edges of the brook were screened by high, thick brush, which ran straight back to the dense, shaggy forest clothing the lower hill-slopes. Here was shelter, here was concealment! Straight for the brook's mouth she headed, and scraped a little sand-bar at its entrance: the stream was much shallower than she had expected. The cold fresh water struck against her breast; the rays of the rising sun warmed her neck and sparkled on the tawny golden masses of her hair.

IN THE soft daylight she did not dare come out and cross the beach, where she would be in full sight of those on the galleys. So she swam steadily up the brook, in spite of weary limbs and aching lungs, till she reached and passed the line of the woods. Here they could not see her.

The cressets had gone out on the wreck and on its enemies lying beside it, a half-mile or so offshore. Hidden in the forest, Fulvia could still hear the brazen voice of Fulk exhorting his men to search every corner of the *Sea Nymph*, to find her body if she lay drowned in the hull, to comb the water around for her swimming, to dive down into the clear depths for her sunken corpse. She heard, too, the high-pitched voice of Ricoberto ring out in a shout of command, and she shrank instinctively into the shelter of the deeper woods.

Thorn-scratched, scraped by dry branches, exhausted with her efforts to push through the thick growth, she was forced to stop. Glancing about her, she found no path, no yielding of the forest's dense green wall. Try as she would, she could not force a passage.

The brook, however, was more promising.

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Here in the woods, its course was often broken by ripples or little cascades, where the banks had caved and dead branches had choked it. But so far as she could see, it was not too wide to wade, and was nowhere impassable. She must follow its course upstream. As she waded, the birds sang with insistent merriment in the thickets, flew in dipping flight from tree to brook, or started up with sudden rush of wings from quiet pools at the plash of her feet.

At last she came to a cleared space on the right bank: cleared long ago, and now dotted with dwarf trees and brush. Huge old stumps, half-rotted, stood all around. Fulvia placed one foot on the shelving edge and mounted the bank, dripping in the dappled sunlight. Suddenly stopping still, she gazed intently ahead. There, its ruined court littered with moss-grown stones, stood a cluster of ivy-embowered Corinthian pillars, the lovely shard of what had been a Roman temple.

The capitals were still intact, and crowned with a broken pediment, the whole of stained, greenish marble. As by a miracle, the shrine below was preserved: a corner of the wall, sheltering the figure of an undraped, enthroned woman with a carven wreath on her brows, and a marble dove on one lovely wrist. The base of the pedestal bore, in letters filled with green moss, the legend:

VENUS ALMA VICTRIX.

Wondering, Fulvia stared at the ruin, herself appearing like the nymph of the grove. There was a rich pagan beauty to the scene: the centuries-old forest, with its sylvan brook; the ancient temple, broken, but still beautiful; and the unclothed, awestruck girl before the shrine.

But Fulvia knew nothing of these things. To her, unlettered like all women of her time, the inscription meant no more than the temple. An enthroned woman in a shrine, however, meant something very definite and holy; and at the foot of the pagan goddess Fulvia kneeled, repeating her "Ave Maria" with fervent devotion. Then, her caution awakening, she realized that if she could climb to the lofty pediment she might be able to see the galleys on the water, and observe if she were followed.

The weathered stone afforded a few footholds, but it was slippery; the vines which cloaked it formed a safer ladder. Up them she dragged herself with lithe strength, till she could fling one arm over a splendid capital. Once at the top, she gazed out over the sea, now sparkling white-crested azure in the crisp morning breeze.

A choked cry burst from her. Fulk's galley lay as it had been, grappled to the wreck; but Ricoberto's was just outside the wide mouth of the brook! 'Round swung the long, graceful hull, as the port oars pulled and the starboard rowers backed water, till the bow pointed out to sea and the stern toward the shore; for the long ram made it inadvisable to dock a Mediterranean war galley bows-on to the beach. Skilfully her crew backed the *Falcon* in, brought her alongside a straight strip of mossy bank that looked like a quay-wall, and there made her fast to convenient trees.

The port quarter gangway was run out and a landing party of thirty men-at-arms disembarked. Dividing themselves into two parties, they deployed rapidly along the sea-beach on either side of the brook, halted, faced inland, and, at a signal from Ricoberto standing on the galley's poop, advanced, like a line of skirmishers, into the interior. Then Ricoberto himself landed and, to Fulvia's horror, came wading up the bed of the brook, alone.

Panic in her heart, Fulvia threw herself face-downward flat upon the pediment, clutching at the green vine-tendrils. Ricoberto knew! This was his country and he was a famous hunter, who knew every stream and trail of his own woods. And, having thrown beaters out on both sides, Ricoberto was leisurely wading up the brook between, waiting for his beaters to frighten and drive her toward him. And now Fulvia remembered the shout Ricoberto had given as she swam into the mouth of the brook. It was light then, and he must have caught the gleam of her hair in the rays of the rising sun. But why, in that case, was Fulk not pursuing her also? Why was he still searching the water and the wreck?

Then the truth flashed upon her. Ricoberto had not reported his discovery to Fulk; he was beguiling Fulk, was hunting her for himself! She shivered; come what might, she vowed, she would never fall alive into the hands of that womanish, cruel, double traitor.

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Lying flat on the pediment, comfortably warmed by the morning sun, she resolved to stay on her rocky shelter. Its height concealed her from the brook; a long, crumbling slab of marble, carved deep with the story of Æneas, formed a low parapet between her and the forest on either side. No one would dream of looking here for her. It was only when she stole a glance over the side that she saw how fatal it would be to stay.

Where she had climbed there were broken ivy-branches all along the column; and in the shadow, where no ray of the sun would dry it, her own wet foot-print, stained with the mold of the ruined court, pointed treacherously to her hiding-place. She must descend at once and find another refuge. She could not hope to keep ahead of Ricoberto's war-toughened rascals long; she must take cover in some spot so secluded that not one of the many keen eyes searching for her could find it.

A flash of color caught her eye. Close to her motionless elbow lay a six-inch lizard, the scarlet bag of his throat distending and emptying with his breath. The sight roused recollection, then anger. Once she had seen just such a jewel-throated creature chased and beaten to death by boys; now she, the Lady Fulvia, daughter of Arnulfo of Rocca Forte, was pursued with still more wanton cruelty!

Her fierce Northern blood roused at the thought. Oh, if she had a weapon, she would face her pursuers, and show them how a conqueror's daughter could defend herself! Careless in her indignation, she raised her head, and a lock of her tawny hair fell across her eyes. The glint of it shone fierily golden in the sun.

"Ah!" she cried to herself, "with a hair of my head I will trap you, Ricoberto the Hunter!"

She glanced rapidly toward the brook, noted the creepers trailing in a brown-flecked pool, nodded eagerly, and clambered down the vine-covered column in haste.

"With a single hair!" she repeated, laughing softly.

RICOBERTO, broad of shoulder and slender-waisted, made a splendid figure of handsome confidence, as he waded up the brook, heedless for once of his exquisite Cordovan hip-boots, now quite spoiled with the water. The light flashed upon his Moorish helmet, and on the arrow-proof corselet of Saracen plate, for which he had paid a golden fortune, abhorring the coarse ring-mail of the Normans. He gazed from bank to bank, peered up the brook, and searched the thick growth of the banks with a gaze whose eagerness was masked with apparent indifference. Sure that Fulvia could not escape his beaters, he dallied now and then to snatch a glowing flower from the brink, or to fling water at a bright-hued insect.

A butterfly fluttered down from a tall stalk, and spread out on a stone before him, lazily sunning its wings. Ricoberto stooped to admire its velvet black and crimson, scooped swiftly with one hand, and swept it up. Having looked his fill, he lazily tore the dainty insect to pieces, and scattered them on the water.

Suddenly he uttered a smothered cry. At the further end of the pool in which he stood thigh deep, a flat rock thrust up its gray surface; and, gleaming like amber across its dulness, lay a long hair of tawny gold. He waded carefully forward into the pool, taking heed not to trip on the creepers that thrust forth into the water, bent forward, and picked up the hair between thumb and forefinger of a dainty glove.

One of the dangling creepers, finger-thick, moved strangely up and back; just as he raised one dripping leg, it pulled sharply, and Ricoberto fell face downward with a heavy splash. His trunk weighed down by his plate corselet, he lay churning in water three-feet deep, choking and strangling. One leg, upthrust above the pool, was held high in air by a slip-noose of green creeper. He was more helpless than a trapped beast, for he was both trapped and drowning.

From behind a mossy rock, sheltered by almost tropical foliage, Fulvia thrust her eager face. Seeing, she stepped out from her cover, and ran forward, reeling the stem of the noosed creeper back in her hands, so that it should not slacken. From the bank she sprang, landing astride Ricoberto's plunging back. Down shot her left hand to where his left arm was flapping madly about, grasped his wrist and with a swift tug brought it up behind his shoulder-blade.

Before he could wrench it loose, her right hand had taken a turn about his wrist with a loop of the creeper; the next kick of his

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own trapped leg drew the line taut. Instinctively Ricoberto's right hand came up over his back to free his left; instantly Fulvia trapped that too, then bound both his wrists tightly together, tying knot upon knot as swiftly and deftly as any sailor. Then, placing one knee and both her hands on his back, with all her strength, she thrust the man deep down in the pool.

She waited until his free leg no longer splashed, until the bubbles ceased to well up from the water, and Ricoberto was limp and still. Then she set to work, dragging the body out over the gray rock, and laying it flat there. With flying fingers she unfastened the straps of his corselet and flung it off, stripped off his boots, his leather jerkin, Cordovan hose and gloves, and tore the helmet from his head.

Faint at first, then nearer and louder, she could hear the shouts of those hunting her through the woods on either hand. In feverish haste she flung on the dead man's outer garments, strapped on his armor, tugged on the wet hose and boots, and belted on his long, slender sword. Then, drawing her glorious hair tight back, she braided it swiftly, thrust it down under the collar of the jerkin, and put on the helmet.

The long curtain of flexible mail that hung behind it she flung over neck and shoulders; over her face she drew the velvet-lined mask of fine chain-mail, with little holes for eyes and nostrils, that formed the Saracen vizor of Ricoberto's helmet. She was now, to the outward eye, Ricoberto himself, with no feature showing, no sheen of hair to betray herself. Thrusting the body into the pool, she waded confidently downstream toward the dead man's galley.

ON THE long strip of mossy bank that looked like a quay—and which had been a quay in the ancient days when this wilderness had been a city—lounged and diced a sprawling half-dozen of Ricoberto's men-at-arms, left behind to guard the *Falcon*. At the sound of a high-pitched hail, they sprang to their feet with one accord, pouching dice and snatching up weapons. Down the brook waded the wet, but jaunty figure of their captain, his war-mask over his face. A spear-length off he halted, and addressed them in drawling, silken tones.

"Ah," he purred with menacing politeness, "so ye must rest from your hard labors while your betters are at work. I will find employment for you. Go, search the forest with your fellows, and it were better that ye do not return till ye have found the Lady Fulvia. Speed, for I am anxious for her."

With perfect mimicry Fulvia imitated the tones of perilous courtesy which always preceded one of Ricoberto's most violent outbursts of cruelty; and the men-at-arms, deluded by the voice, flew in swift apprehension toward the wood to carry out the order. Drawing sword, and plucking a tuft of dry grass from the bank, she carefully wiped the glittering weapon, and advanced swaggeringly up the gangway, where she found herself confronted by the one fighting man who remained aboard: a stocky, swarthy fellow in steel cap and mail, and armed with a short broadsword. It was the overseer of the galley-slaves. Pointing to Jaufré, the captain of her escort, who, as she had heard Ricoberto command in the dark, sat shackled to the starboard stroke-oar, she commanded:

"Unshackle that fellow. I would have sport with him."

The imitation was perfect; but the overseer stood stock-still, the hair on his shaggy neck bristling like that of an angry dog. His eyes burned suspiciously, fixed on hers, which she concealed behind dark, lowered lashes, lest he see that they were blue.

"First raise that mask!" barked the overseer.

A sudden swift flash, and the man leaped back just in time to escape Fulvia's sword, dragging out his own as he sprang. Steel clashed on steel, the burly overseer parrying one fierce thrust after another, backing farther and farther before a hand and wrist more supple, if weaker than his own. Along the raised fore-and-aft bridge between and above the inboard ends of the rowers' benches he backed, fighting doggedly, his heavy blade chopping through Fulvia's guard again and again, only to be stopped by the plate of proof.

At last, as his panting opponent paused to draw breath, he heaved his sword on high, brandishing it with both hands for a mighty blow. The pretended Ricoberto suddenly dropped all appearances of weariness and leaped in, driving the point of her long blade through his throat from front to back.

Breathing fast, Fulvia walked swiftly aft between the rows of excited slaves, who

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were torn between their fear of the supposed Ricoberto and their delight at the death of the brutal overseer. Fulvia mounted the poop, faced them, wiped her dripping sword, and took off her helmet. The slaves burst into surprised shouts; the dying overseer recognized her through the film that clouded his eyes, and it became clear to him, too late, what it was that had made him suspicious of her: when she had drawn and wiped her sword the set and motion of her arms were not those of a man's. He cursed gaspingly and died.

Glancing from his body to the slaves, Fulvia addressed them in a calm, authoritative voice:

"Ricoberto also is dead. I slew him. When Fulk learns of it it will go hard with both you and me. Therefore you must stand by me and obey my orders. If ye are faithful I will give you freedom and much gold. Arnulfo's daughter does not break her word. Will ye obey?"

Grateful for the overseer's death, wild with joy at the promise of freedom and wealth, the slaves could hardly be restrained from giving loud voice to their emotion. With one accord they swore fidelity, clasping their chained hands and begging her to unfasten their shackles. But this was just what Fulvia knew better than to do.

These men were the scum of the Mediterranean: criminals from Palermo, working out the penalty of savage crimes; captured Greek and Saracen pirates; broken thieves and cutthroats from the African coast. She dared not free them until she should be safe in the harbor of Rocca Forte, lest they turn against her in the evil of their hearts. Therefore she bade them wait, and with the point of the overseer's hammer she knocked the pin from the chains that bound Jaufré alone.

The slaves, furious with disappointment, began to clamor. She shouted stern orders at them, but they roared her down. Seizing the dead overseer's whip, Jaufré cracked it menacingly at them; but Fulvia laid her hand on his arm.

"Let them be!" she commanded. "I have promised them their freedom and I will not begin by abusing them."

Jaufré pleaded with her, urging that their shouts would soon attract the suspicion of Fulk, whose galley would sweep down upon them.

"We are but two," he insisted; "we must beat these dogs into submission and force them to row while there is yet time to escape."

Fulvia shook her head, her white lips closed firmly.

Wrathful outcries from the wood rang through the shouts of the slaves. Turning Fulvia saw the flash of mail through the trees, heard the clamor of the men-at-arms who had just found Ricoberto's corpse, and knew that they would hasten to the shore to seize and kill his slayer.

"See!" she cried to the galley-slaves. "Behold the dogs of Ricoberto, who thirst for blood. Will mine alone satisfy them, do you think? Row for your lives!"

Smitten with cold fear, the slaves bent to their oars, striking and splashing in their confusion. Swiftly Fulvia cut through the bow and stern warps with her sword, while Jaufré's knotted arms strained at the gangplank. With a grating rattle, he dragged it aboard single-handed. Taking the helm herself, Fulvia called the stroke in a well-simulated imitation of Ricoberto's voice; the oars began to pull together, and the *Falcon* shot out into deep water.

With loud shouts of rage, the landing-party raced down through the salt grass, waving their weapons and grimacing with fury. But they stopped at the water's edge, for they had no boats, and the *Falcon* was a good ship's-length from the shore.

NOW Fulk heard, and his suspicions were roused indeed. Leaping from his seat in the cabin of his galley, where he was questioning Fulvia's rescued maids and the other survivors of the *Sea Nymph*, he ran to the rail and hailed the *Falcon*.

Now until that moment Fulvia had had no thought of doing anything but head down the coast and run full speed for Rocca Forte. But, as Fulk hailed, an audacious thought shot through her brain; instead of coming about, she held straight on and brought her prize to within a cable-length of the other galley. There she spoke quickly and quietly to Jaufré, who put the overseer's whistle to his lips and blew "Rest oars!"

His brazen voice ringing out over the water, Fulk again demanded the cause of the uproar.

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Her war-mask once more concealing her features, the girl answered—

"Fulvia!"

"Have you found her?" bellowed Fulk.

"She is here!" Fulvia replied.

The astonished slaves, not sensing her purpose, and in terrible fear of Fulk, began to claw with their oars; but a low command and a few swift sentences from Jaufré quieted them.

"Is she safe?" Fulk questioned.

With a convincing imitation of Ricoberto's falsetto laugh, Fulvia replied—

"Safe indeed, noble Fulk, and longing to pour her wrath into your ears."

Fulk sounded the silver whistle that depended from his neck; a small boat was put overside, and he lowered his huge frame into it. As the boat came alongside the *Falcon*, Jaufré, his face concealed under a wide-brimmed hat of plaited straw and averted from Fulk's gaze, caught and held its bow. With a bold smirk and a fine swagger, Fulk climbed aboard. Facing the figure which stood at the break of the poop, he asked—

"Where is she?"

"She is here!" Fulvia shouted, casting her helmet to the deck.

On the instant, Jaufré thrust his mighty arm and shoulder against the bow of the small boat, sending it half-way back to its parent galley.

"Give way!" he roared to the *Falcon's* rowers, as he whipped out the overseer's sword and turned to follow Fulk. "Give way!"

A warning cry from the startled crew of the rowboat beat upon Fulk's ears; but he was too stunned with the sight of Fulvia's face above Ricoberto's armor to heed the cry; and when his keen Norman mind reasserted itself he had thoughts and eyes for Fulvia alone. Drawing his sword, he set foot on the steps leading up to the poop, bent on disarming and seizing her.

Just then the *Falcon*, urged suddenly by the obedient arms of the excited galley-slaves, bounded ahead, nearly flinging him to his knees. Hearing steps behind him, he looked back and saw Jaufré's menacing form, sword uplifted to strike. Loudly Fulk shouted to his own ship's crew; but fully half his men were still searching the *Sea Nymph*, or sweeping the bottom with a drag stretched between the other two small boats. Hearing his cry, they pulled alongside as fast as they could; petty officers shouted, the trumpet blew, wreck and galley were in a riot of confusion.

But even with a fair start, his ship had no chance in a race with the *Falcon*, one of the swiftest ships on the coast; far less chance now, when Fulvia's galley-slaves were pulling for freedom. And Fulk himself was trapped, with the thirsty sword of an angered countess before him and the blade of a veteran soldier behind; while the *Falcon* bounded on to safety.

He had no choice, no chance; and he knew it. If he struck at Fulvia, Jaufré would hew him down from behind. If he turned to deal with Jaufré, Fulvia's blade would run him through the back. His courage oozed away. With a groan, Fulk flung his sword into the sea, and dropped to his knees before his injured lady.

"Mercy, most noble one! Mercy, gracious lady!" he begged.

"First bid your crew row quietly behind, without attempting a rescue; and command them to treat my servants and my maids with respect," Fulvia countered.

Obediently, Fulk roared his orders till one answered that they understood.

Then, in the silken tones of Ricoberto, Fulvia said to Jaufré—

"Let Fulk be put to use; chain him to a bench."

Eagerly Jaufré dragged the traitor to the nearest bench, freed the slave who tugged at the huge sweep, and chained Fulk in his place, thrusting the oar into his hand. The slaves burst into jeers and gibes at the fallen nobleman, taunting him till he cowered behind his oar; then mockingly they bade him pull strongly, lest he keep Arnulfo's gallows waiting.

Then, while Jaufré took the helm, and the liberated slave brought her meat and wine, Fulvia gazed down from the poop upon her prisoner, upon the captured *Falcon*, and upon the prize that followed laboriously astern. Setting down a quail's wing half eaten, she called—

"Fulk!"

The humbled traitor looked up, his face crimson with shame.

"Have you had enough of treason?"

He nodded ignominiously.

"Then," she laughed, "if Arnulfo spares your life, plot no more against him. Remember, he is the father of Fulvia of Rocca Forte!"

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A FREE-TO-ALL MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS, AND ADVENTURERS

WITH his second story in our magazine Major Frederick S. Macy follows Camp-Fire custom and stands up to introduce himself to us. We bought the story before the United States entered the war, and Major Macy, then a captain, wrote to us from the U. S. Army Transport *Buford*, somewhere between the Canal Zone and San Francisco. Since then I've sat across the table from him at the Adventurers' Club when he was stationed at Governors Island. No one is supposed to know the whereabouts of any soldier nowadays and perhaps we're doing him an injustice in still giving his rank as major. I hope so.

Some time ago you asked me for a fairly full biography, and I prepared one; but by an inadvertence it was not mailed before this ship departed from New York.

However, I shall correct the matter now, in case you are still desirous of it, for it is only natural that those who read a story should ask by what authority the writer speaks or upon what experience he bases his narrative, in order to form a just opinion of the value of the picture.

THE early part of my existence began forty years ago in Detroit, Michigan, when I was formally presented to my parents as an addition to a long line of Colonial descendants, the first of whom found Massachusetts an uncomfortable place of abode for Quakers and removed himself to Nantucket. Whittier's poem, "The Exiles," celebrates the performance, but really contains more poetry than fact.

After the period of schooling, and growing up in a thoroughly domesticated way, as most boys do, I entered a prominent Boston institution for the preparation of physicians and graduated therefrom in 1897.

IN 1900 I entered the Army as an acting assistant surgeon, and my life, since then, has been filled with many things; with professional honors and education such as I, at least, could never have received in civil life. I have had experiences and trials of many kinds, as well as triumphs and the discipline of an ordered, active career, which is, I think, the secret of real happiness as well as of usefulness. I have felt the pain of long separation from those who are dear, and the unparalleled joy of reunion with them. I have faced death in many forms, and what is sometimes harder, life. I have felt the caress of my babies' hands and the blandishments of human foxes.

FOR nearly four years I hiked, as they say, with many different military organizations over the largest islands of the Philippines. I saw men conquer and I saw them die. I saw the natives of those islands under all conditions, peaceful and savage, in idolatry, cannibalism, and in what passed for Christianity. So, too, I have seen the soldier under all the conditions of his life, maligned and lauded, in peace and in jungle warfare.

In 1900 I returned to God's country, and after a service in our home posts went again to the Islands in 1907. This time I spent a little over three years among the head-hunters of Luzon. There, two little sons came to me, and their nurses were two brown lads of the high mountain tribes, who loved them as tenderly as women.

In 1910 I came home again to America, back to the posts and the routine of barracks and quarters. During the last two years I have been wandering about over two oceans on a transport, and just now I am on a voyage from New York to Manila by way of the Panama Canal and Honolulu.

So you see I have been much of a traveler both in the Occident and the Orient, and in other countries than the Islands. But I speak of them particularly because of *Paddy*.

EXCEPT as a type, he had never an existence. But it is types which I wish to show; to show you the soldier as he is, your Army as it is. I want you to know it and to love it, its traditions, its honor, its privations and its joys; to feel that it belongs to you and your people, individually and collectively. I want you to live with me in it, to revere the noble, heroic women, the wives, who see their men depart for God knows what, and yet can smile at them a brave good-by—till the dust has settled again.

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And I want you to believe that what I say of them all is true to the life as I have seen it. For I shall not distort truth to fit the play, nor endeavor to conceal the fact that they are just as human as others. I shall not always paint a rosy day. You must be patient with their faults. In any case you will be proud of them and glad to call them yours.

THE modern Army surgeon has many military duties to perform in addition to those that are strictly medical. So I hope to take you and yours with me through many adventures, though in the armor of the easy chair, and to listen to the men jesting in barracks as well as making light of their pain in hospital.

Upon my return from this voyage I expect to go to a post once more. There is many a story of the sea, I find, that has not yet been told, and I shall bring back some of them with me.—FREDERICK S. MACY.

HERE is a greeting to us from one of the real pioneers of the old West, just a friendly hello and handshake:

Los Angeles.

Dear old plainsmen, stage guards, horse-breakers, scouts or miners—greeting. I belong to your tribe. I am not a big chief or a big cheerful liar. Anyway, age has changed me a little from the old ways of the frontier to a mellow, thinking, contented man. I once roamed the mountains and valleys and the plains. Now in my little cottage my sweet old wife and I are enjoying ourselves. With love for all I ask you to listen to my story. First, I would like you Camp-Fire boys not to expect too much from one who never was very much. I passed through the frontier from 1856 until lately. I broke horses that were running wild over the plains of our California, Nevada, Oregon and Utah from the mountains to the sea. I did my duty as I saw it. Have no excuses to make, only am a poor writer. But my friend, E. A. Brininstool, has asked me to write the Camp-Fire. He, Brininstool, is a live wire. He can do justice to the old boys by story and verse. I knew Frank Gruard; Brininstool's story is very correct. So I will only introduce myself to you all as your friend.—CLARK B. STOCKING, "The Old Guard."

WE IN the office are trying an interesting stunt. Managed to squeeze out four or five bound volumes of *Adventure* from our office files and are going to turn them over to some library to be sent to some of our boys at the front. In each one we're writing a brief message from us of the staff, sending our greetings and good wishes and asking every man who reads any of the stories to write his name on the fly-leaves and, when they are filled up, on the margins of any of the pages, giving the unit to which he is attached. And we're asking, too, that when the war is over if there happens to be anything left of the books, any or all of them be sent to our office, at our expense, to be kept always as very wonderful souvenirs.

BACK in the Fall there came to me a letter from our comrade Basil D. Woon, one of whose exploits on the Mexican border we have heard from others. Several weeks later came the second of the two following letters, both from "somewhere in France":

France.

This is my first line to you since the war, I think. My last, I believe, was from Dallas, Texas, and the one before that from Mexico City. Well, this isn't Dallas, Texas; nor is it Mexico City; but I've been here long enough to feel almost at home. As a matter of fact, my home is in London, so I am nearer to it now than I have been for many a long day.

I SUPPOSE you have seen that poster—by Gibson, I think—"Don't Read History; Make It." I think it was as much that poster as my innate love of "butting in," combined with a bit of "wanting to do something," that caused me to enlist. I thought it would be great fun, making history. It is, but it isn't a bit as I had pictured it. Do you know, after seeing the way war is waged under modern conditions, I believe I'll take the Mexican brand for mine, and thank you kindly. There's too much precision, too much system, too much machine work for me. Why, half the fun of war as we played at it in Mexico was the joy of taking somebody by surprise, or being taken by surprise oneself. And a man *felt* some one down there. Here he is only one of a score or so millions, all doing the same thing. I have just put in a transfer to the Air Service, having at last scraped through the physical, and I sincerely hope that there at any rate one's individual self will count a tiny bit, anyway.

I SUPPOSE something like this is in the minds of most of the other boys, but outwardly we're all happy and contented and waiting for our chance. It's a great game, anyway. France has treated us well, every one has been most kind, our quarters are about four times as good as any of us expected, and the chow is better than we got with Pershing in Chihuahua. In fact, if there's any scarcity of food in France it isn't inconveniently noticeable. Prices are either about the same or slightly less than one pays in the States—which is not so bad when you consider all these wild claims Germany has been making. *I* haven't noticed any one hungry, and I've only met one beggar during the entire time I've been in France. He met me at the Place de la Concorde one afternoon in Paris and exhibited five distinct wounds gained in the war. *That* man had a *right* to beg. I felt ashamed to be the one handing it to him—he had given so much and I hadn't even begun to give anything. I realized then what a lot of lost time we Americans have got to make up for.

The trouble about a letter like this is that the censor has nothing to do except delete. It becomes a habit with him, and I'm afraid if I go rambling on I'll transgress some rule or other and this letter won't reach you at all.—BASIL D. WOON.

His second letter brings up the point of *Adventure* in France. We've tried hard to make it obtainable over there and are still trying, but the chief answer is that ship

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tonnage is needed for more important things than magazines. I've personally sent quite a few copies to Camp-Fire comrades over there, but not many of them seem to reach their destination. At this writing any public library in the country will send books and magazines, received in good condition, to our forces abroad for general distribution, and post-offices will send magazines carrying a one-cent stamp and, in some cases at least, I understand, with or without the printed line on the cover, but to put a magazine on sale over there in large quantities is a different matter.

France.

One of the fellows just came over to my desk and whispered: "Hey, there's a copy of *Adventure* on that table!"

"Grab it, for the love of Mike!" I answered, and he did. I have just been looking it over, and the result of the perusal is this letter.

AS I WRITE you, I'm in France with the American Expeditionary Forces, holding down temporarily a job as sergeant in the Quartermaster Corps. I say "temporarily" because I have put in for a transfer to the Air Service, and, having passed the physical, am expecting to be ordered away in a few days. Meanwhile I am learning all I can at the French aviation camp near here.

Some day I hope to have something real to write you about—some day when I've actually done something—but just now there's nothing particular that I can say. Our boys over here are in splendid spirits and aching for action. They'll get it, too, no doubt about that. They are working like beavers at the new game of war, and the French instructors say they're learning rather remarkably fast. This is easily understandable when one knows their officers—as fine a set of men as I have seen anywhere in the world. One instinctively knows that whatever these men set out to do that will be done, and no nonsense about it.

THE French people have met us very cordially and we have no complaints to make. By the time you receive this the news will be a trifle stale; however, I may interpolate that we have excellent quarters, good beds and plenty of first-class American chow. Nothing to kick about—not even the weather, which has just turned chilly after a long spell of Indian Summer.

There are just three things we need now—a constant supply of all three. They are: smoking tobacco (American vintage), plenty of mail, and *Adventure* every month. I'm going to give my copy to the Y. M. C. A. after I get through with it and ask them to padlock it to a table, so that every man in the outfit will have a chance to look it over. But I wouldn't give it up now to my best brother.

WE HAD a brush with a Sub coming over—missed us by ten feet. That was a long time ago, because I came here the 1st, so I suppose the censor won't find anything censorable in the information. I expect it's been printed in America, anyway. I happened to have just gone on duty as helper at Gun No. 4 when the thing happened. A little towheaded Jackie startled the fits out of me by yelling "Torpedo!" in a voice that could be heard all over the ship. I looked to port and, sure enough, there was a wake, about three feet wide, and coming like Billy-be-damned right for my feet. I thought of a number of things in the ensuing seconds, I can tell you, and I think my bitterest reflection was that some other lucky son-of-a-gun would be writing the story. I wasn't sure whether I would come down on top of the gun or whether the gun would come down on top of me. However, the thing missed by a shadow and we got in a shot or two at the periscope. Some say we hit; some that we missed. I'm personally neutral.

WELL, I'll close with the personal assurance to you that America's "Old Contemptibles" are "doing themselves proud," and that you folks back home will be having lots of things to read before long. Hope to hear from you soon. With remembrances to all my friends in and out of *Adventure*.

—BASIL DILLON WOON.

IT'S mighty seldom you are asked to follow the fortunes of a woman as the central character in one of our stories. Our interests don't run much to boudoirs and other ladylike affairs. But the Lady Fulvia wasn't a lady, at least in that sense, and boudoirs meant nothing to her. She lived in an iron-hard age and held her own—and then some—among the men of a race who have never been surpassed as grim fighters and adventurers par excellence. She could wear a sword, and use it, but most of all she could use her wits. And God help the hard man and grim fighter who crossed the path of this warlike, beautiful, courageous and very likeable and human young woman. Tougher men than you, my friend, have matched themselves against her and, one by one, you'll hear what happened to them.

I give Fulvia this careful introduction to you because I know she needs it. When the authors suggested her adventures for your reading, I shied away. I don't run to boudoir stories myself and view with deep suspicion any woman presented as being some one whose deeds would make good reading for us. But, having learned what she really was and did, I've surrendered as to Fulvia, and when you've got acquainted with her I don't think you'll blame me. The adventure given you in this issue is only one of several and, as most of you probably aren't any more familiar with the time and place she lived in than I was, the authors here give the setting, color and general understanding that make the picture living and complete:

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Long ages before the shepherds of Latium laid the first primitive walls of Rome, forgotten peoples whose very name has almost vanished, were fighting desperate wars for the possession of Sicily. This loveliest and most fertile of islands, lying in the middle of the Mediterranean, was destined from the beginning to be the meeting-place and battle-ground of nations.

THITHER came the exiles, the fortune-hunters, the adventurers of all the world—the greedy merchants and luxurious princes of Carthage; the daring colonists of Greece, with their matchless military skill and their passionate love of beauty; the Romans, seeking universal empire; plundering Goths and piratical Vandals; the myriads of effeminate Byzantium. Thither came also the two fiercest of medieval peoples: the Arabs, at the height of their inundating conquests, drowning out the survivals of Roman civilization and enslaving all that called on Christ; and the half-viking Normans, who spoke French and lived like their Norse sires.

AMID the rich beauty of Sicily all these races ruled for a time, were absorbed, and fell before the rude vigor of the next conquerors. Yet one, more than all the others, held what it had taken and made itself the arbiter of Southern destiny.

This was the Norman folk. Never more than a mere handful, almost lost among thousands of alien blood, these Northern adventurers carved their way to empire through hosts of pagan Saracens, liberated the oppressed Greco-Sicilian Christians, and drew the island within the intricate network of their superb organization. On the ruins of a score of dead civilizations they set their throne; in the veins of their subjects ran the blood of half the world; their castles, churches, and palaces were rich with the blended art of Europe and Africa. Never the birthplace of a ruling race, Sicily was the glorious spoil of all who adventured by land or sea.

Law-givers though they were, the Normans were harsh and brutal to their captives, treacherous and ruthless to one another. The natives, Christian and Moslem alike, were driven to band together in secret, to plot in the dark against the conquerors, so that out of such obscure leagues the Mafia of a later time arose, with all its heritage of hidden treachery.

NOT till Roger the Great, himself the first of Normans, was crowned king at Palermo in 1130 did the land know justice and peace. Even then the wilder of his countrymen could be held in restraint only by the long swords of their more law-abiding kinsmen. So Norman baron fought Norman baron, on one side greed and lawlessness, on the other order and honor; till all were alike absorbed by the kindly motherland of Sicily, and became Sicilians.

IN THE middle of this strife between Norman law and Norman license these stories of Rocca Forte are set. The child of a Norman father and an Italian mother, Fulvia of Rocca Forte loves the land of her birth no less than the viking traditions of her ancestors. Born in the very year of King Roger's coronation, she regards herself a Sicilian, and considers the oppressed Sicilians her own folk, to be loved and cherished. She is sought in marriage by all who have seen or heard of her beauty and her father's well-kept lands; but she will not listen to the suit of the blood-stained robber-barons. Her own shrewd brain and her father's sword suffice to defend her against the strength and cunning of her disappointed lovers.

She lives in a time celebrated for learning and art as well as for its brutal savagery. The rich plains, the rugged mountains, the enchanted coast-line of her land is strewn with the shards of dead cities and forgotten ports, out of which her Greek and Moslem subjects create new loveliness in stone and metal. Her king welcomes to his court Moorish scholars and Byzantine artificers, and builds universities to house the wisdom of all lands and times.

THEN, into this varied, many-colored life, strikes the swift fervor of the Second Crusade. God wills the destruction of the unbelievers who threaten His sepulchre; men's hearts are set on fire with flame from Heaven. But cosmopolitan Sicily dares to resist the call of Heaven. Roger has Moslem subjects of his own, peaceful, industrious, faithful men; and he sets their well-being higher than the need of Jerusalem. Yet the Crusade will not let him rule his land in peace; when all Europe burns with religious enthusiasm, one little land can not remain unkindled.

Civil strife and rapine around her, the storm of the Crusade threatening from without, her people buffeted by the strokes of both, Fulvia of Rocca Forte has barely reached her eighteenth birthday when she must defend her people and herself. Before she is nineteen the disaster of 1149 sends the backwash of the beaten Crusade swirling in upon her. She is the storm-center of Sicily; Sicily is the storm-center of the world. From the bleak North, the burning South, the conquest-greedy West, and the gorgeous, colorful East, the tides converge upon her.

These stories tell the tale of her struggle to keep her people safe, to be true to her traditions and her ideals, to find happiness for herself, and for Sicily.

FARNHAM BISHOP and ARTHUR GILCHRIST BRODEUR.

FROM Peru comes word from our comrade M. R. Cuthbertson. The omitted part of his letter deals with several men whom many of us know, but, though there are only pleasant words concerning them, this part of the letter was probably not intended for publication. One episode I'm leaving in, but omitting, with regret, the man's name. I shouldn't think he'd mind having his name given in this connection but he isn't where I can get his definite assurance.

Tirapata, Peru.

Something tells me that it is a long time since I have given you an idea of my doings and whereabouts. The last time I wrote I believe I was in Arizona. Nothing exciting happened for a long time. I took a little jaunt to Arkansas and worked for a while in the mines and mills and a smelter of the Joplin zinc district of Missouri about a year ago last March to June, but the West called me and I went back to the same old hole eventually, then things took up the same old course until last January, when I was offered a chance to come down here.

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SAW ——— ——— in Arequipa, Peru, a few weeks ago. He had a lot of trouble with the law in Lima a while back for tearing the can off of a German with one of his famous punches. The last I heard of him was that he had gone to ———.

That's about all the news I can give you, and I doubt if any of it is news by now. I haven't seen an old-timer for a —— of a while; guess they are all over in the "World's Series" by now. That is something that I am going to miss, I guess. But I have my reasons, which are good.

MYSELF, I am on the east side of the Andes and about one hundred and fifty miles from the railroad. We are down about seven thousand feet and the country is quite tropical. The camp is about six miles from the Inambari River which reaches the Amazon in time; it flows into the Madre de Dios, which empties into the Madera, and the Madera flows into the Amazon.

The trail goes on into the Amazon country and all of the rubber that is shipped from Mollendo comes through this camp. It would make a good story if it was written up right. I haven't the time or I would make a stab at it.

This is a gold proposition and a winner, but it is all work and nothing but the Victrola to play with. The fact that it is one hundred and fifty miles by mule and two days more by train to Arequipa, stops us from making many trips.

If any one should happen to ask you where I am just hand them the address below.—M. R. CUTHBERTSON, care of Inca Mining & Development Co., Tirapata, via Arequipa, Peru, S. A.

A WORD from one of us with the American Expeditionary Force "somewhere in France," one of the many of us, by the way, who was also one of the twenty-five thousand of our American Legion:

WE ARE billeted here in a pretty little rural town, the boys sleeping in houses, garrets, barns, etc. Am very fortunate myself in having a whole room with a real bed in it, the first bed I've slept in, by the way, since last July, when we were called to the colors.

Will write more fully later, when we are not restricted as much as we are at present. Would be glad to hear from any of the Camp-Fire crowd at any time.—C. F. WHITELEY.

A WORD from one of our women comrades who is doing her bit at home:

Montreal, Canada.

Hello, Camp-Fire! May the "female of the species" salute? I have only about a year's acquaintance with you, but many a lonely, dreary hour you have helped me pass. You see, "my pal" enlisted with the 73d Royal Highlanders of Canada and has been gone overseas over two years, and we have tramped many trails together, read much together, and now, while "little folks" and I keep camp-fires burning at home, waiting lonesome-like, you help much, and "The Big Pal" writes me he enjoys you, too, as he lies in the hospital at Aldershot, England, where he has been the last six months. So I send you greeting and best wishes.—MRS. ——— ———.

IT'S been a long time since we've had word from our comrade, Albert Kinross, whose stories we enjoyed in years past. He is in Egypt and in an interesting service. The photograph referred to is one, sent me before the war, which, as a newspaper correspondent, he had secured in Russia during a former revolution, and I had written asking for some forgotten data.

I wish I could agree with him that the war is over. Germany will be beaten, but now, writing in mid-Winter, the wise thing for us to do is to settle down to the understanding that it's going to take time and greater effort than we've yet put forth.

Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

Your letter of July twenty-eighth reached me here in the desert. My address is Lieut. A. Kinross, A. S. C., attached C. T. C., No. 1 Depot, C. T. C. Egyptian Expeditionary Force. C. T. C. stands for Camel Transport Corps, so you may imagine I am having a change from mules, horses and torpedoes. I had the dubious pleasure of assisting in a U-boat affair a short time back. Still it's all food for later on.

Now the photo depicts a band of Lettish revolutionists (1905-1906) who felt so sure of themselves that they had their pictures taken. This is one of the pictures. On the evidence of this picture many were executed by the government forces which suppressed the revolution. I hope above will do.

How are you and *Adventure?* I had a letter from *Everybody's* some time ago asking me for a story. No chance, unless I get to the hospital again, which I am not anxious to do, thank you.

The war is really over bar the killing. Germany is beaten, but how can the Kaiser and his friends admit it? I wish the U. S. A. could attack from the Russo-Rumanian side.—A. KINROSS, Lieut.

THE responses to "You and Democracy" exceeded my expectations by both their number and earnestness. Nearly a month's illness prevented a prompt reply to these responses and the movement will designedly advance slowly. The American League for Citizenship has been incorporated, its general work and certain of its specific tasks are definitely mapped out, but in these and in determining its further specific tasks the co-operation of all interested is desired. It is not a one-man, but a democratic organization. There will be as few officers as possible; it stands for the idea that office-holding is not opportunity for self-glorification and self-advancement, but the undertaking of extra work and extra responsibility.

Full information will be given slowly but as fast as possible.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will sell: 1911: March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December; 1912: January, February, March, April, May, October, December; 1913: January, February; 1915: August, September, October, November, December.—Box 978, Houston, Texas.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp or at the Front.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

(As the magazine is made up several months in advance, the above notice will appear with only such stray names as happen to come in to us until there has been time for it to reach the camps and the front and for names and addresses to reach us, be put in type and then reach our readers on publication.)

BACCHUS QUANEY, Armed Draft, U. S. S. *Astoria*, Postmaster, New York.

WALTER T. PRICE, care of *Adventure*.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
J. P. TUCKER, Hotel Lansdale, 1410 Minor Ave., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Tucker.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. - *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, care of Starbuck Ranch, Morrison, Colorado. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 303, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps, NOT attached*)

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16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3 Portugese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, care Paul Tausig & Son, 104 E. 14th St., New York, N. Y. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

Southward by Motor and Shanty-Boat

Question:—"Am thinking of leaving Philadelphia about December 10th with my wife. Have a Ford roadster and am intending traveling south until we get tired and then selling the Ford and buying a shanty-boat and traveling down the Mississippi as far as New Orleans. Will have approximately $200 in money and the Ford, here in Philadelphia, would sell for $175. Am willing to work and my wife is as adaptable and could work, too.

"Have we enough money and how long would it hold out? What sort of work is there to do? Have never had any river experience. Would I have to have experience to navigate the river?

"What sort of an outfit should I have, and would it be better to get it here? Should I have a rifle? Do you think if we carried blankets and other necessary things, we could save money by camping out farther south? That is, before we sell the Ford?"—JOHN C. KENNEDY, Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You will need a small, compact camping outfit for your auto-shanty-boat trip. I should get, say, two waterproof tarpaulins, two good woolen blankets, a grid to cook on, three or four pails, a frying-pan or two, cups, knives, forks, spoons, etc. All the cooking outfit will be found in ten-cent stores. Carry as few things as possible, but when the need is found, add to the stock of supplies. Chains for the car will be indispensable.

A double folding cot, with canvas tarpaulin to cover it, would serve to sleep on; or hammocks under trees.

If you carry a .22 caliber single-shot Remington rifle, with plenty of ammunition, and keep it clean, it should supply you with quite a little game along the road.

Stewart Edward White's book on camping (60 cents, any book store), will serve you well. A. R. Harding, Columbus, Ohio, prints a book "The Cabin-boat Primer" which I wrote, to tell all about shanty-boating.

Before making the main start, go out for a night or two with your outfit and try it out, and then you will find what you need, and what you don't need. Two sleeping-bags, under a wagon cover, or waterproof, or under a small tent, to sleep in, are excellent. You can make them yourself out of heavy canvas and mixed blankets, having them to lace up and thus you can spread them open for airing.

Your expenses will be gasolene, oil, food, repairs, and on $200, I should think you could go 100 days, 60 miles a day (3 gallons gas).

You would find work almost anywhere; even in hard times, when workers were more plentiful than work, I found jobs on farms, in log camps, etc. I could not say for certain regarding your wife, but if you had a tent, and pitched it for days or weeks near jobs—men are scarce now—you should always be able to find something to do. I suppose your course will be south, and then westerly, and

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then, in the Spring, northerly up the Mississippi valley.

By going straight down to Florida, you would strike work there in the Winter resorts, perhaps finding work as a caretaker, or the like, of a place, or motorboat. You would find letters of recommendation useful in identifying you. If you had told me your trade, business, perhaps I could have suggested something—timekeeper in a sawmill or log camp; or machinist, in cotton gin. I found that I could get the job, if I could adapt myself to it, however. Stevedore, roustabout, logger, deck hand, farm hand, cattle drover—there are a thousand unskilled things to do, if one is willing. A skilled man is sometimes at a disadvantage, however, because he won't take a labor job. I saw a man looking for a job painting, down the Mississippi; he could have made $2 a day on a log job, but he must paint! On the Mississippi, log camps and levee camps offer employment for men.

I've met just such outfits as yours on the road; sometimes they were flat broke, but I never saw one yet which regretted having made such a venture. In a month or six weeks you will know exactly what to do and how to do it—if you are game to stand rough weather and occasional discomfort.

My boy and I slept under canvas, open both sides and front, for a week, a few days ago, freezing and raw at night. We had 3 waterproof blankets, one under, one over us; one pitched to shed rain and make a roof. A woolen blanket under a waterproof was plenty warm. Our camping outfit weighed under forty pounds. You can have one of 100 pounds on car.

The Caribou Country

Question:—"Kindly give us what information you can relative to the Caribou Country you mention in British Columbia. Also all literature, pamphlets and information relative to soil, value, how far from railroad and a general description."—A. O. CLAVE, Ottosen, Iowa.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—Your brief inquiry gives me no indication as to what your reasons are for asking about the Caribou country which makes it rather difficult unless one got busy and told you all he knew which, in my case, would take some time and space. You should have told me whether you are interested in a hunting, prospecting, land-locating or sight-seeing trip and thus have given me something definite to work on. You should also have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope. In short, you simply smashed nearly every rule in connection with Ask Adventure, and as a punishment I am going to hand you the best I have.

The Caribou district holds nearly everything an outdoor man can ask for. It is a fairly rich mining country, and the prospector who understands his business stands about as good a chance of making a stake here as any place I know of. The placer mines of the Caribou and Cassiar districts produced over half a million dollars in gold in 1914. Since then the war has interfered with everything to such an extent that no reliable data is obtainable, but it is a safe bet that the pockets and creeks are not all washed yet by any means.

In many parts of it there are wide stretches of wild meadow which make it a splendid stock-raising country, and the general belief is that stock will Winter in the open without loss; but a supply of fodder sufficient to last three months will be found a valuable assurance against herd shrinkage in the event of a hard Winter. I distinctly recall one Winter in particular when any self-respecting critter would have laid down and died rather than live to enrich the man who would not feed it through the hunch of weather which was spread over that country at the period of which I write.

As to climate, generally dry, making irrigation necessary in many parts where mixed farming is followed, of which, by the way, there is an abundance and carried on very profitably.

The hunting is excellent, the mule deer being as much of a standby here as the jack-rabbit in other localities. There are also bear and caribou, with an occasional bighorn sheep, while goats are common. The fur consists of beaver, lynx, weasel, marten and muskrat and the trapping is generally very good. The grouse and chicken are abundant, while ducks simply swarm on every lake and pool. Geese are also to be found in respectable numbers.

The climate is strenuous but healthy, ranging from 90 above in Summer to 30 below in Winter. The residents will tell you that while this is a pretty broad range, the climate is so dry that you do not feel it. Mebbyso, but when one becomes accustomed to it there is no noticeable hardship about it.

To get there I would make Ashcroft *via* Canadian Pacific Ry., from whence auto trucks and stages may be had to almost any part of it. There is another route *via* Grand Trunk Pacific to Prince George and then down the Fraser River to Soda Creek; but the Ashcroft route is the more direct.

I have no literature relative to the district, but application to the Department of Lands, Victoria, B. C., will bring you what you require.

The New Guinea Oil-Fields

Question:—"What information can you give me about the Papuan, or New Guinea, oil-fields? To what extent are these fields developed? Is the climate agreeable to an American?"—S. B. PELTON, Smethport, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—There is very little information available concerning the New Guinea oil-fields. They are really in an experimental stage. Now that the whole of the New Guinea group of islands has come under the control of the Australian Government—the German group was captured by the Australian Expeditionary Force immediately after the outbreak of the war—it is intended to develop the oil-fields and carry on further investigations. So far the surface, so to say, has only been scratched for oil; and as Australia has no oil-fields on her own continent, I should consider it a safe tip to say that there will be some boring going on vigorously in the immediate future. If it is in your line, get out to it soon. Expert oilmen and experienced workers in that line are scarce in these parts, where boring for oil is quite in its infancy. The great demand for oil created by the war has given an impetus to this new industry in the Pacific. Oil has been tapped in New Zealand, in New Guinea (a very wide field, full of great possibilities), and there is even talk of tests in the Tahiti (French) group.

Climate? Well, Americans are familiar with extremes—why should the humid heat of New

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Guinea daunt an adventurous spirit? It is some hot, of course—isn't it on the Equator? Agreeable? For a salamander, yes—all the year 'round.

I should advise you, before coming to a final decision, to state your case and credentials and hopes and aims to the Minister for External Affairs, Melbourne, Australia. The Australians are courteous and enterprising, and will certainly give an American who is exempt from war service full information, as they want some expert and suitable settlers for their new territory in the South Seas.

Canadian Big-Game Hunting

Question:—"After a wonderful season's hunt I am now beginning to plan for next year. It's a habit of mine to plan all Winter and Spring for the Fall hunting, and really it's a good habit for it's surely a great lot of fun.

"Next Fall we want to go for moose and, through our great *Adventure*, I find that you are giving advice to the tenderfeet who have designs on your country in this way.

"We have in mind the Rainy Lake and Nipigon districts or others nearer home, mostly for the reason that our time is always limited and the time on the train is a consideration.

"What will be of most use to us at this time will be maps of the region or information of where to get them, showing the things that we want to see, and an answer to the following points:

"The best places, and the best *near* places. We want to know so that we may not be foolish and stay away from better hunting in favor of the poorer when a day or a few miles will take us to the latter.

"The probable cost of the trip from the railroad terminus or outfitting point.

"The probable minimum time necessary for a hunt from railroad in and out. We can figure our own time on the train and the side trips we may want to take en route.

"We will favor a country in which there are both deer and moose, and other shooting, should everything else be equal and we have the time to go for both.

"Do you feel that the shooting of this year was such that barring the unusual, next season will be good?"—Wm. Saltmarsh, Miller, S. D.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—This subject of big-game hunting is one I have made a very extensive study of for the past fifteen years. Would suggest, as a preliminary, your obtaining and reading following articles, viz.:—

"The Game Trails of Canada" in January No. H-T-T (1917).

"After Moose in Northwest Quebec" in April No. H-T-T (1917).

"Northwest Quebec—The Moose Country" in October *Outdoor Life*.

"Into the Hidden Country" in October *Outer's Book*.

Considering the "mooseland" of Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec what does one find as the essential factors? Here they are: (1st) Non-resident license cost: Manitoba $50, Ontario $25, and Quebec $25, (2d) Open seasons: Manitoba commencing November; Ontario commencing October 10th north of T. C. Ry., other portions opening November 1st; Quebec opens September 1st; (3d) The Height of Land areas of Ontario and Quebec, which are the cream of the moose areas of all the North, are essentially a water-hunting region of countless lakes and streams, practically without a road and, therefore, the methods of successful hunting are (a) water-hunting by canoe during all September and "calling" from September 15th to October 25th. All these shallow moose waters are liable to freeze up any time after October 25th, hence the only time to figure on a satisfactory trip for moose lies from early September to around October 27th, at latest.

The writer has given this entire region close study and actually spent some five big-game seasons in both Ontario and Quebec, and has found, beyond any question, that Ontario's open season, even starting October 10th, practically prohibits one having any degree of success, inasmuch as at most one has only some ten days before he has to look out for ice, and, on the other hand, Quebec, that is the new Abitibi Region known as "Northwest Quebec," just opened up, is a mooseland containing as many moose to the square mile as any equal area in America, and that the open season, starting September 1st, enables one to get in, legally, the time the game may be found on water and during the height of the rutting period. Therefore, every reason and every actual factor forces me to say that Northwestern Quebec is *the* territory to select for a moose trip, and the time to go should lie any time between September 1st and end by October 26th.

Selecting this new Abitibi Outdoors, having the whole North country to choose from, the writer has undertaken a series of hunting camps for you fellows seeking a *real* trip and I am enclosing herein more specific data concerning same.

This territory was hunted on only during the past two seasons and in these only on a very limited scale: the results show as follows:

1916....17 Moose, 2 Bear, 1 Caribou.
1917....16 Moose, 6 Bear.

The Rainy Lake and Nipigon areas are O. K. for moose but by the time you can hunt these (November 1st) the game has left water and it is practically impossible for any but a woods Indian to travel the bush.

The question of clothing depends largely on the time you go on such a trip. I would strongly advise your selecting this Northwestern Quebec region in preference to any in the North.

Specific details I will gladly send on further request from you. Pick out a period in September or October, state the number in your party, and I'll give you full, inside dope.

The North, being a mooseland, is not, naturally, homing deer in any great number—moose areas are never good deer country. Some of it that we know of is A 1 for bear and there are some caribou and some deer.

Homestead Land

Question:—"Does the U. S. Government have land in some of the Northwestern States that is suitable for grain raising? Do they give it for the asking? What conditions are required to own such land? What amount of land does one person receive? What would be the condition of the soil and probable distance from a railway?"—John A. Coffey, Fairmount, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The Federal Government has no land to be given for the asking in

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any part of the country. A man must pay anywhere from $1.25 an acre to $2.50 and comply with certain regulations about improvement.

When you file on the land under the Enlarged Homestead Act you pay 25 cents an acre filing fee. Then you make improvements of a certain value and extent, live on the land, if not desert, for a fixed time, and then take witnesses to the land office, prove up and pay the balance. You do not have to live on a desert claim any fixed time, but you must have a certain number of acres under cultivation.

Under the Enlarged Homestead Act you may take up 320 acres. There are desert entries under different laws, there are mineral claims, timber claims, valuable stone claims, etc. You had better write to the Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C., and ask for circular 484 which tells you where vacant land lies and how much. That is, it tells the acreage in each county and its general character. Then ask them to send you any pamphlets that contain land laws.

It is impossible that I should tell you soil conditions and distances from railway. There are millions of acres vacant, and the soil varies tremendously. No man, not even the man in charge of the land office, can tell you soil conditions all over the vacant land in any one district. It would take a hundred men many years to compile information on that subject with any accuracy and it would make a huge array of books when finished. Besides, you have to swear that you have examined the land carefully before you can get it.

Western Ranches Want Help

Question:—"We would like to get on a cattle or sheep ranch, with an idea of learning the business. What district would be the best suited for us to start in?"—JOSEPH HINES and LOUIS DE STASIO, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—At the present time there is a shortage of men all over the West. You will find cattle and sheep ranches all over Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona and New Mexico. There are some in the Coast States, but not many very large ones.

Miller & Lux, headquarters San Francisco, Cudahy, branch office this city, Hauser Packing Co., this city, Maier of this city, all have ranches in California as well as below the line.

There is a woman in this town right now who lives at Miles City, Mont., and owns a 24,000-acre cattle ranch there. Montana and Wyoming are simply great for cattle and horses and I would go straight to Miles City if I had an idea of getting work on a ranch. Arizona is good, but it gets so all-fired hot in Summer that I personally dislike it.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY FIVE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS

EDWARDES, SAMUEL, 25 years ago connected with the *Pueblo Chieftain*, Pueblo, Colorado, later assayer at West Cliff, Colorado, the inspector of mines in Gunnison district (?), representative of Colorado Mines Bureau at Portland Exposition, last heard of 10 years ago in connection with a lead property in Cœur d'Alene district of Idaho. Information as to present whereabouts desired by HENRY K. FORT, 2227 N. American St., Philadelphia, Pa.

STATON, HENRY A. (HEINE). Height about 5 ft. 7 in., weight about 138 lbs., light-brown hair, blue eyes, rather deep set. In walking carries one shoulder slightly higher than the other. Last heard from Thanksgiving, 1915, from Anaconda, Montana. Said not to write till he wrote again as he was going to some camp to see about a few weeks' work. Intended to be in California before January 1, 1916. Any information thankfully received by his brother. Address CALVIN C. STATON, Napa, Calif.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WATTS, EARL L. Brother. Last heard from at Racetrack, Montana. Wrote he was on the way to Alaska in 1915. Any information as to where he went from Racetrack will be thankfully received.—Address ORLO C. WATTS, 709 N. Walnut St., Orrville, Ohio.

MAGNUS, ALF. Twenty-five years old in April. In the Navy one year. Army, under the name of Arlvid Eggen. Last heard of near Selina, Kans., Spring, 1916; before that December 2, 1915, Galveston, Texas.—Write mother, MRS. G. MAGNUS, 4659 Hazel Ave., Chicago, Ill.

LARSEN, LAWRENCE. Sometimes called "Larry." He is six feet tall; weight 170 lbs.; gray-blue eyes; brown, curly hair and is hard of hearing. Last heard of working for a cattle outfit on the Little Big Horn in Montana near old Fort Custer in the Fall of 1894. His age was then about 24. He is now about 48 years old, if living. I have good news for you Larry. Please let your old sidepard know where you are.—Address ROBERT MCCLURE, Hughus Springs, Texas.

HICKY. Last seen when the S.S. *Minnesota* discharged her crew, November 30, 1917, in New York. Your old shipmate Scotty would like to hear from you.—Address VINCENT H. SCOTT, Vancourt Inn, Rosell, New Jersey.

ANDERSON, ALEX. Over 70. A red-headed Scotchman. Last heard of in San Francisco, Cal. Well-known in Santa Clara Co. Any expenses connected with looking him up will be paid.—Address ALEX JAFFRAY, care of WILKINS, 260 Athol St., Oshawa, Minn.

MR. McDONALD, Chief Engineer, or any of engine-room gang alive, on tank steamer *Montana*, reported torpedoed by submarine, please communicate with C. M. MAPLES, care of Miscellaneous Shop, U. S. Naval Gun Factory, Washington, D. C.

WARREN, HARRY O. Last heard from at Royal Oakes, Michigan, in 1915. Have since heard that he was with the Michigan troops on the Mexican border. He is 24 years old, about 5 ft. 10 in., 165 lbs., and has brown hair and eyes. His mother is very anxious about him.—Address E. J. WARREN, Manhattan, Montana.

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PRINGLE, JOHN A., called "Jack." Last heard from in 1912. Was then private in Co. F., 8th U. S. Inf., stationed at Fort Hains, Alaska. Before that was member of Co. I., 13th Inf., at Leavenworth, Kansas, and Monterey, Cal. I will greatly appreciate any news of him. Address D. I. RICH, Box 881, Okmulgee, Okla.

PAVIDSON, JULIUS. Last heard of from Oklahoma City. Communicate with D. LEVINE, Co. C., 328 Inf., Camp Gordon, Atlanta, Ga.

POOLE, E. M. Civil engineer. Missing since 1914. Spent several years with Engineer Corps in Brazil and in Mexico. Last heard from as having escaped from Mexico with two other refugees bound to New York City. Any information will be thankfully received by his mother.—Address MRS. E. A. POOLE, Irvington, Va.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

CHERRINGTON, DON K. Has been missing since the 30th day of January, 1917, from Detroit, Michigan. Twenty years old, 5 ft. 7 in. tall, blue eyes, light complexion, light bushy hair; size 7 hat; size 7 shoes; tattoo of anchor and eagle combined below elbow. Any information would be thankfully received by his mother.—Address MRS. C. C. CHERRINGTON, Box 166, Glouster, Ohio.

WITTER, L. P., brother. LULA A. and LILLIAN M. WITTER, sisters. Last heard of LILLIAN M. WITTER in Greenfield, Conn. Girls probably married.—Address W. F. WITTER, 116 Washington St., Alexandria, La.

SMITH, JAMES (real name NICHOLAS PINLEY). Enlisted in the Marine Corps, December 1, 1896, and served throughout the Spanish-American War. Was honorably discharged at Mare Island, Calif., December 26, 1901, but did not re-enlist. Should any reader know his whereabouts please write to his lonely brother.—Address CHARLES FINLEY, 1034 Blue Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-March or First April issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BROWN, BERRY; Campbell, Orville, R.; Cox, Sherman W. or Cox, Austin A.; Diggs, John W.; Evans, Will; Flint, Harry; Goodacre, Leon; Hall, J. Harold; Hargett, Fred L.; Hogan, John *alias* Frank Burke; Holl (Bob), Robert; Hopkins, Horace; Lee, Leeland and Bennett; Lynch, Miss Barbara; McCully, Manning; MacDougall, Dougall; Meadows, Robert E.; Miller, William Gustaf; Pelton, Fred; Raymond, W. L.; Rogers, Athure; Rogers, Nelson Miles; Ross, David H.; Sheridan, Martin A.; Siler, Walter; Stevenson, Alexander M.; Vinc, Peter; Wargo, Joe; Watkins, O. V.; Williams, Thos. Jefferson; Zun, Edw. "Blondy."

MISCELLANEOUS—Lawrence Shato; Thurston Houghton; Frank Dewey; Otto Seaton; Corky Clark; Bernard Benny; Preston.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays.—JACK P. ROBINSON.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Twelve stories without once putting foot into the parlor or donning a full-dress suit—twelve stories of the great outdoor world, you will receive in the first May *Adventure*, which reaches you on April 3d. Besides the two mentioned in the ad on page 2 you will find:

The Iron Arm *By Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*

Another story of Rocca Forte and the *Lady Fulvia*—a story in which *Count Arnulfo* of the Iron Arm proves his right to the name.

The Unlisted Legion *By Gordon Young*

A story of the South Sea Islands, a trusting missionary, and an islandwise trader—and why the latter was reported because of his activities at Niko.

The Wild Ride of Thornton Upton *By Herbert Slocombe*

The old ex-engineer has had many queer experiences but the queerest he avows was the time he rode in a Union Pacific cab while *Thornton Upton* counted off the seconds on his watch.

Tennessee Joe *By Hapsburg Liebe*

Tennessee Joe the newsboy lives by himself under a New Orleans wharf—a home secure from prying eyes. But one night he admits a stranger and a new interest comes into his life.

Taylor's Finger *By William Dudley Pelley*

Central America is accustomed to ghastly sights, but even there *Taylor's* finger creates a sensation—pointing and swinging on its silken cord.

The Way of the Strong *By Robert J. Pearsall*

The captain is a powerful man and a hard one—so when the *Condor* went to the bottom, the survivors clinging to her deckload await his next move in terror.

The Smiler *By Arthur James Hayes*

A story of the North and of one of the many strong all-man figures who have developed it. Such a man you meet in the *Smiler*, on "the fringe of things."

Hidden Trails. *Part IV* *By William Patterson White*

With the whole territory gasping at their unsolved exploits the road-agents add another shock by robbing the Army paymaster. *Johnny Ramsay*, busily investigating, strikes some interesting telegrams and starts to close his net.

Salt of the Earth *By W. C. Tuttle*

Magpie Simpkins and *Ike Harper* visit Painted Post and discover that rocking-chair prospecting pays much better than the regular brand.

The Cellini Emerald Affair *By William A. Shryer*

Again you meet *Josiah Simms*, the Detroit ex-lawyer. When his friend, *Judge Durham*, is reported killed *Mr. Simms* takes up the case.

FIRST MAY ADVENTURE

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GERMAN SOLDIERS IN AND ALL OVER THE PLACE DE LA BOURSE, BRUSSELS, SEPTEMBER, 1914

What do you think the German troops whistled as they marched into Belgium?

Brand Whitlock, United States Minister to Belgium, saw the German army enter Brussels in September, 1914. Without music or fife or drum or flag, the sinister field-gray ranks of the best-disciplined army the world has ever seen poured into the city whistling—what? Not "Die Wacht am Rhein"; not a military march or pæan of triumph, but the musical comedy favorite—"Every Little Movement Has a Meaning All Its Own"!

A hundred such side-lights on Kultur—some grim, some sensational, some humorous, all intensely interesting—make vividly real the biggest story that has come out of the war.

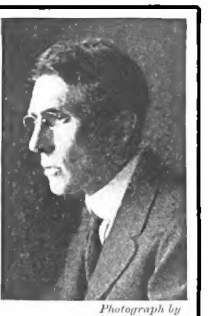
Brand Whitlock saw more of German oppression than any other living American. All that he endured in silence for three long years was carefully preserved in a daily journal from which he now draws the facts for a stupendous story, exquisitely told.

The overwhelming pathos, the merciless facts, the heart-breaking record of bitter truths that have never before been revealed must steel America to a united stand against a ruthless enemy.

The Whitlock story of Belgium's tragedy began in *Everybody's Magazine* for February and will run through at least ten issues. The second instalment, "The Storm Breaks," appears in

Everybody's Magazine

March Issue, at the News-stands February 23d



Photograph by Paul Thompson

BRAND WHITLOCK

Our entrance into the war forced Mr. Whitlock's removal to Havre, France, the present seat of the Belgian Government, and from there he is sending, month by month, his wonderful story.

EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE, (2nd April Advenure)
New York City.

You may enter my subscription to *Everybody's* for one year beginning with the March issue. I enclose.....for $1.50.

Name .....

Address .....

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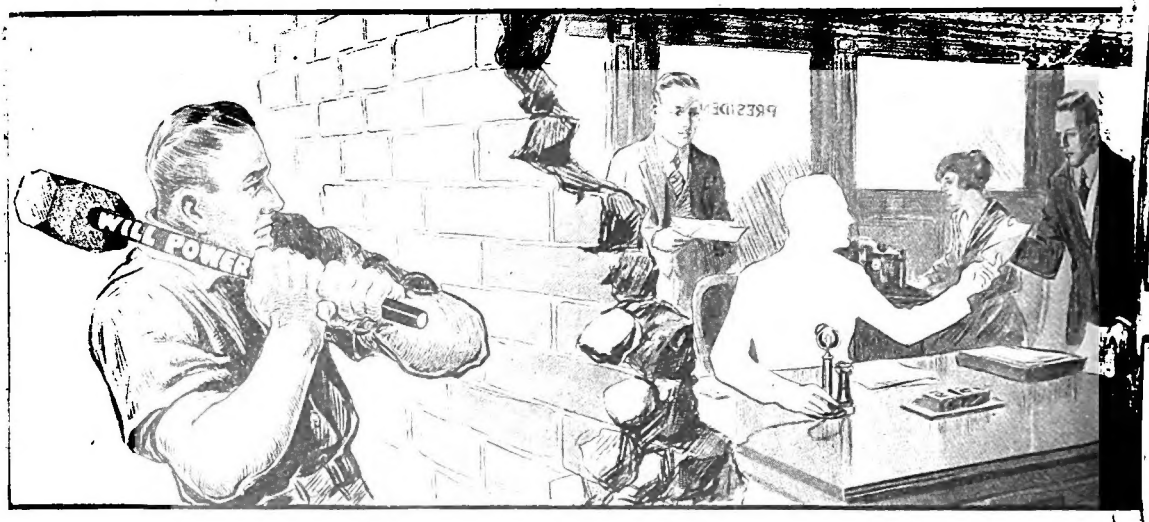

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Read "Power of Will" 5 Days Free! Send No Money!

What Readers Say

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"From what I have already seen I believe I can get $3,000 to $30,000 worth of good out of it."—*C. D. Van Vechten, Gen. Agent, Northwestern Life Insurance Co., Cedar Rapids, Ia.*

$897 Profit First Week

"'Power of Will' is a compilation of mighty forces. My first week's benefit in dollars is $900—cost $3; profit $897." (Figure what his yearly profit would be.)—*J. W. Heinland, 916 Tribune Building, Chicago, Ill.*

$1,500 to $50,000 Yearly

"Three years ago I was making $1,600 a year and working day and night. To-day I make $1,000 a week and have time for other things as well. To the lessons in the book 'Power of Will' do I owe this sudden rise."—*(Name on request.)*

50% Increase

"More than a year ago I purchased 'Power of Will' and I firmly believe that it—and it alone—has enabled me to increase my salary more than 50% in that time."—*L. C. Hudgens, Principal, Mayhew Consolidated Schools, Boswell, Okla.*

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"I have received 1,000% profit on my investment and can see no reason why it will not mean thousands in cash as well as helping me in all other ways."—*C. W. Shanks, Payette, Idaho.*

Pelton Pub. Co.,
48-H Wilcox Block
Meriden, Conn.

Gentlemen:
Please send me a copy of "Power of Will" without charge. I agree to remit $3.00 or remail the book in 5 days.

Name .....

Address .....

Why aren't you a *leader* in your line? You've got the brains—you've got ability—you're chock-full of ambition. You are *entitled* to success—why aren't you achieving it? What's holding you back? What's the big barrier?

Some people say, "You can't keep a good man down." They're wrong. A good man *can* be kept down. Because no matter *how* good you may be, if you can't lift up your head and *tell the world you're good*—if you can't drive home your ideas with a thud that makes your presence felt where you want it felt—if you can't set your eyes on a certain goal and ride roughshod over all obstacles until you hit the tape—in short, if you haven't got a firm, unbreakable will-power to help you smash discouragement and trample upon opposition—then, you're going to *stay* down and you're going to *keep* down. Down in fortune, down in success, down in happiness, down in your own estimation and down in the pitiless eyes of the world.

The Man With the Will Wins

You may be a human dynamo of energy—you may be overflowing with vitality—your memory may be remarkable—in fact, you may have all the requisites for a big success in life, but if you haven't the *one* big motive-power, A DOMINANT WILL, then, all of these other abilities will never get you anywhere. You may have big ambitions, but if you haven't the will-power to fight against all odds to reach those ambitions, they'll evaporate into nothingness. You may have good sharp brains, but if you haven't the will to *demand* that they earn big money for YOU, then some one else will benefit and "cash in" on them. You can NOW strengthen your will until it becomes the motive-power necessary to carry you forward to fortune. You can NOW develop the enormous power which lies latent within you—a power which, if rightly trained, will make every one of your dreams come true.

A Strong Will Easily Acquired

The most wonderful thing about a strong will is that it can NOW easily be acquired by anyone. Prof. Frank Channing Haddock—a scientist whose name ranks with such leaders of thought as James, Bergson and Royce—after 20 years of research, investigation and study has shown that the will is just as susceptible to development as the muscles of the body, and has prepared a remarkable set of exercises and lessons which have already revolutionized the lives of over 250,000 men and women in all walks of life in all parts of the world. These rules and exercises have now been put into book form by the Pelton Publishing Company and are offered for free examination—no money in advance.

That this book has achieved some remarkable results may be seen from the letters shown in the left-hand panel. These are but a few of the thousands of letters received.

It is interesting to note that among the 250,000 owners who have read, used and praised "Power of Will" are such prominent men as Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Lieut.-Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; Asst. Postmaster-General Britt; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis; Governor Arthur Capper of Kansas and hundreds of others equally prominent.

Examine It FREE—Send No Money

We are willing to let this book speak for itself and stand on its own merits. We will send it to you, without a penny in advance, for free 5-day examination in order that you may convince yourself of what this book must mean to you and to your future. Mail the coupon below now and if, after free examination of the book, you feel (and we are certain that you will feel) that it will repay you many times its small cost of $3, keep the book and remit this amount to us—otherwise, return the book and you will owe nothing.

No proposition could be fairer than this and we feel that if you make this book yours, some day you will give it the credit for having started you along the right path to success. Pelton Publishing Company, 48-H Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

Partial List of Contents

Law of Great Thinking.
The Four Factors on which it depends.
How to develop analytical power.
How to think "all around" a subject.
How to throw the mind into deep, concentrate, controlled, productive thinking.
Detailed directions for Perfect Mind Concentration.
How to acquire the power of Consecutive Thinking, Reasoning Analysis.
How to acquire the skill of Creative Writing.
How to guard against errors of Thought.
How to drive from the mind unwelcome thoughts.
How to follow any line of thought with keen, concentrated Power.
How to develop Reasoning Power.
How to Handle the Mind in Creative Thinking.
The secret of Building Mind Power.
How the Will is made to act.
How to test your Will.
How a Strong Will is Master of Body.
What creates Human Power.
The Six Principles of Will Training.
Definite Methods for developing Will.
The NINETY-NINE METHODS for using Will-Power in the Conduct of Life.
Seven principles of drill in Mental, Physical, Personal power.
FIFTY-ONE MAXIMS for applied power of Perception, Memory, Imagination, Self-Analysis, Control.
How to develop a strong, keen gaze.
How to concentrate the eye upon what is before you—object, person, printed page, work.
How to become aware of Nerve Action.
How to keep the body well poised.
How to open the Mind and Body for reception of Incoming power.
How to exercise the Nerves.
How to throw off Worry.
How to overcome the tyranny of the Nervous system.
How to secure steady nerves.

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